



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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MEDIA CONTACTS

Jared Touchin (928) 221-9253
Jolene Holgate (928) 380-4174
Crystalyne Curley (928) 286-7918
nnlb.communications@gmail.com

Law and Order Committee receives report on successes and needs of Aneth Judicial District Court

ANETH, U.T. – On Wednesday, the Law and Order committee approved a verbal and written report provided by the Aneth Judicial District Court regarding current activities and projects.

LOC chair Council Delegate Edmund Yazzie (Churchrock, Iyanbito, Mariano Lake, Pinedale, Smith Lake, Thoreau) and his committee colleagues held the meeting in the community of Aneth, as part of their ongoing initiative to visit judicial facilities and reach out to judicial and public safety officials across the Navajo Nation to provide a firsthand perspective on issues and conditions.

Aneth Judicial Court administrator Susie Martin reported on a review on the Community Court program, the Tribal and Community Re-Entry Court program provided by the U.S. District Court and District of Utah, ProSe Classes provided by the Staff Attorney, case load statistics, community survey overview, future goals, state borders and jurisdictional concerns, and other challenges.

The report highlighted the success of a pilot project known as Community Court. The project serves as an alternative problem solving court function, which collaborates with service providers to deter crime rates by rehabilitating individuals in the justice system. Martin explained that the rural community does not have many options to contend with crime, which led to this alternative.

“We lack a prosecutor, police officers, defense counsel, and a jail. These services are provided from Shiprock two days a week. We only have one officer on duty. Therefore, we established an alternative resource to restore the justice system to manage crime. We hope to make the Community Court a permanent program,” stated Martin.

LOC vice chair Council Delegate Raymond Smith, Jr. (Houck, Klagetoh, Nahata Dziil, Tsé Si áni, Wide Ruins) commended Martin for the unique approach the district has adopted to deter crime based on their limited resources.

“This is a great pilot project to deter crime and recidivism. It gives a chance for individuals to get involved with community trash pick-up, garden projects, and horse and colt gentling trainings,” said Delegate Smith.

Delegate Smith also pointed out that the Community Court statistics show a decrease in crime and also shows that less than four-percent of those who commit a crime become repeat offenders.

“I recommend that our courts adopt this program because it restores justice and most importantly, offenders help their local communities,” added Delegate Smith.

Other challenges for the Judicial Court include the expiration of grant funding for the Community Court’s resource coordinator position, the need for a larger court facility, and lack of adequate funding for maintenance and repairs.

LOC member Council Delegate Kee Allen Begay, Jr. (Low Mountain, Many Farms, Nazlini, Tachee/Blue Gap, Tselani/Cottonwood) recommended that the committee meet with the Navajo Nation Division of Public Safety to address the lack of a permanent court facility.

“Aneth judicial court was given a modular building, but they need a permanent structure. As a committee, we need to voice this concern during the next work session with DPS,” stated Delegate Begay.

Martin said the community received a modular building in 2010 to house the court, however, she pointed out that the facility does not have adequate space for its staff, adding that she could offer additional recommendations to the committee during the upcoming work session.

LOC chair Council Delegate Edmund Yazzie (Churchrock, Iyanbito, Mariano Lake, Pinedale, Smith Lake, Thoreau) recommended that the district provide budget recommendations and to host a work session with counties to address public safety needs and to provide updates on all public safety government-to-government agreements.

At the conclusion of the discussion, Law and Order Committee members approved the report with a vote of 2-0.

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