



## 23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Budget and Finance Committee receives report from Pinon Chapter regarding public safety project**

**PINON, Ariz.** – On Tuesday, the Budget and Finance Committee received a report from Pinon Chapter regarding the proposed Dził Yijiin Justice Facility, which would be located near the community, which is located approximately 44-miles west of Chinle, Ariz. The proposed facility would house a police substation, detention center, courts, and dispatching.

BFC vice chair Council Delegate Dwight Witherspoon (Black Mesa, Forest Lake, Hardrock, Pinon, Whippoorwill) who represents the Pinon community, along with Pinon Chapter officials presented the report to committee members, which included a written report and a layout of the proposed justice facility.

Delegate Witherspoon said Pinon has residents that were affected by the Former Bennett Freeze, and were relocated to the area from their traditional and familial land areas, which has caused intergenerational trauma and violence within the area.

“Many of our Navajos had to relocate to the Pinon and Hard Rock area, and because they are not originally from the area, discrimination against one another has occurred and has caused tension between community members,” said Delegate Witherspoon. “So there is a critical need to have a stronger public safety presence to increase the protections of our people, elders, and children.”

Delegate Witherspoon added that land has also been designated for a proposed police academy and community college campus site, which would be placed under Diné College.

According to Pinon Chapter, approximately 20-acres has been withdrawn for the construction of the proposed 47,000 square-foot justice facility, which would require nearly \$33 million to complete. The chapter has completed the required archeological, environmental, and cultural assessments and clearances.

BFC member Council Delegate Leonard Tsosie (Baca/Prewitt, Casamero Lake, Counselor, Littlewater, Ojo Encino, Pueblo Pintado, Torreón, Whitehorse Lake) stated to committee members that the funding could be derived from funds from the Ramah Navajo Chapter v. Jewell settlement, in which the Navajo Nation was awarded \$58 million from the federal government.

“When a community wants safety, that is also an elder issue. How can I convince my colleagues that the funds need to be put towards public safety needs right now? I think we can take \$30 million from the settlement, give \$10 million to Pinon, Kaibeto, and Pueblo Pintado, areas that need public safety improvement. I am willing to do an amendment to fight for that,” said Delegate Tsosie.

Delegate Tsosie added that if the \$58 million were invested into a trust fund, it would be difficult to access the money and would not be available for several years down the road when it begins to earn significant interest.

The chapter stated that the maintenance and operation would be maintained through the Navajo Nation Division of Public Safety after the facility has been completed.

Council Delegate Tom Chee (Shiprock) stressed the importance of aiding the community in fulfilling their public safety needs, and said it was imperative to the success of younger children in grade school.

“The higher the community is stressed – the higher the crime rate and violence. Violence and trauma affects academic learning of the kids and they may fall into unconscious negative behaviors. If you take care of the mental welfare of your people, then you will fix a lot of these social problems,” said Delegate Chee.

BFC members voted 3-0 to accept the report. The Budget and Finance Committee invited the chapter to a meeting to discuss other avenues of obtaining funding, which will be held on April 6 in the community of Pinon.

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