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Health, Education, and Human Services Committee approves measure to combat human trafficking on the Navajo Nation

TEEC NOS POS, Ariz. – On Monday, the Health, Education, and Human Services Committee approved Legislation No. 0117-17, which seeks to amend Navajo Nation Criminal Code Title 17 to enact law to combat and prevent human trafficking on the Navajo Nation.

According to the bill, it states that the intent of the law is to deter human traffickers by criminalizing the offense, prescribing appropriate punishment, giving priority to the investigation and prosecution of trafficking offenses, and protecting and providing justice to victims.

HEHSC member Council Delegate Nathaniel Brown (Chilchinbeto, Dennehotso, Kayenta), sponsor of the legislation, said human trafficking is relatively new to the Navajo Nation, however, there have been an increasing number of trafficking cases involving young Navajo girls.

“Human trafficking needs more attention by all our Navajo people, especially by our Navajo Nation police and social services employees, and leadership. We must keep an eye on the most vulnerable and at-risk Navajo youth because studies show that many are never reported missing, and that is very disturbing,” said Delegate Brown.

Delegate Brown said that the increase in human trafficking on the Navajo Nation is due in part to young girls being “baited” through social media by traffickers posing as individuals who make promises of entering into a relationship with the victim, providing money, and by any other means to coerce victims to agree to leave with them.

“These young people are suffering, and the sad truth is no one is looking for them and they continue to be abused, threatened, sold for money, become addicted to alcohol and drugs, and sometimes killed. We all need to be educated on human trafficking and continue to look after each other as Diné citizens,” said Delegate Brown.

The legislation defines human trafficking as “the illegal recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, or receipt of a person, especially from another country, with the intent to hold the person captive or exploit the person for labor, services, or body parts. Human trafficking offenses

include forced prostitution, forced marriages, sweat-shop labor, slavery, and harvesting human organs from unwilling donors.”

EHSC chair Council Delegate Jonathan Hale (Oak Springs, St. Michaels) said there is a critical need to educate the Navajo public regarding human trafficking, especially parents and guardians.

“This problem is taking our young Navajo girls away from their homes and we have to do everything we can to bring them back and prevent it from happening. Parents, guardians, I urge you to talk to your children and educate them on the dangers of social media and interacting with strangers. Monitor what they are doing as much as you can,” said Delegate Hale.

Delegate Brown and Delegate Hale both serve on the Naabik’íyáti’ Sexual Assault Prevention Subcommittee, in which members recently added human trafficking as one of the subcommittee’s priorities in preventing sexual violence and child abduction.

EHSC members voted 3-0 to approve Legislation No. 0117-17. The bill moves forward to the Law and Order Committee for consideration, and the Navajo Nation Council serves as the final authority on the legislation.

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