



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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New cyberbullying provisions intend to deter suicides among Navajo youth

WINDOW ROCK – On Sunday, leaders of the Navajo Nation gathered as Resolution CJA-09-18 was signed into law, which amends the Navajo Nation’s Criminal Code to address cyberbullying by strengthening the Judicial Branch’s ability to hold offenders accountable and to deter future offenses.

The 23rd Navajo Nation Council unanimously approved the resolution on Jan. 25. Prior to the introduction of the new provisions, the Navajo Nation had no laws or provisions that dealt with cyberbullying.



PHOTO: (left to right standing) Chief Justice JoAnn B. Jayne, Council Delegates Jonathan Hale, Amber Kanazbah Crotty, Nathaniel Brown, and Speaker LoRenzo Bates, as President Russell Begaye signs Resolution CJA-09-18 into law at Quality Inn in Window Rock Ariz. on Feb. 11, 2018.

Speaker LoRenzo Bates (Nenahnezad, Newcomb, San Juan, Tiis Tsoh Sikaad, Tse’Daa’Kaan, Upper Fruitland), Chief Justice JoAnn B. Jayne, Council Delegate Jonathan Hale (Oak Springs, St. Michaels), Council Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty (Beclabito, Cove, Gadi’i’áhi/To’Koi, Red Valley, Tooh Haltsooi, Toadlena/Two Grey Hills, Tsé atnáoz’t’í), and Council Delegate Nathaniel Brown (Chilchinbeto, Dennehotso, Kayenta) came together as President Russell Begaye signed the bill into law.

Delegate Crotty, who sponsored the cyberbullying legislation, said the resolution signifies the fact that the Nation’s leaders are looking ahead to protect children by addressing cyberbullying, which continues to affect many youth on the Navajo Nation and across the country.

“We are protecting our children – that is our responsibility as leaders, as parents, and guardians,” said Delegate Crotty, who previously noted that one-in-three children report that they have been

victims of cyberbullying, which often leads to suicide among youth. Suicide among Native American youth is three times the national average.

The resolution states that cyber bullying is the “use of an electronic communication, such as text messages, emails, phone calls, social media, etc. to bully another person.” It goes on to state that for the “purposes of determining jurisdiction for offenses involving electronic communications, an offense is committed within the Navajo Nation if an electronic communication device transmission either originates or is received in the Navajo Nation.”

Chair of the Health, Education, and Human Services Committee, Delegate Hale said the new laws are needed to keep up with the changing times, as cyberbullying becomes more prevalent as more and more Navajo youth become active on social media.

The amendments to the Criminal Code include the following new language that address cyberbullying under the existing offenses of manslaughter, stalking, and harassment:

- Manslaughter: “A person commits manslaughter if the person recklessly causes or contributes to the death of another, including via electronic communication device.”
- Stalking: “Making unwanted or frightening contact with another through postal mail, Internet, or electronic communication, including but not limited to radio, fax, phone, texting, or email.”
- Harassment: “A person commits harassment when that person intentionally or knowingly causes emotional distress to another by repeatedly shaming, degrading, humiliating, placing in fear, or otherwise abusing personal dignity, including via electronic communication device.”

Immediately after signing the bill, President Begaye said he is hopeful the new provisions will deter cyberbullying among Navajo youth and that it prevents suicides from occurring, while noting that he had been recently informed of another suicide of a 12-year-old Navajo boy who took his own life after having been bullied.

“We don’t want this to happen again. We are doing this for that purpose and this law will be in place to protect our kids.”

The Navajo Nation Council approved the cyberbullying provisions by a vote of 14-0 through Legislation No. 0366-17 sponsored by Delegate Crotty. The new provisions are effective immediately.

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