



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Health, Education, and Human Services Committee supports amendment to promote economic development through the production of cannabis

WINDWO ROCK – On Monday, the Health, Education, and Human Services Committee considered Legislation No. 0213-17, which seeks to amend Navajo Nation Code Title 17 to allow for an exception in the criminal code stating, “it shall not be unlawful for any business, as defined in 12 N.N.C. § 308 (D), to cultivate and produce cannabis or hemp, for economic, industrial, or scientific purposes.”

According to the legislation, it states that the amendment is intended to advance the Navajo Nation economy, promote economic development, and create additional economic opportunities with the intent to improve the standard of living on the Navajo Nation, in addition to promoting health and welfare of Navajo citizens.

Legislation sponsor Council Delegate Lee Jack, Sr. (Dilkon, Greasewood Springs, Indian Wells, Teesto, Whitecone), said amending Title 17 would allow for a controlled substance such as cannabis or hemp to be cultivated to be used for medicinal purposes, and increase revenues for the Navajo Nation.

“People think of this in a bad way, but we have to change their minds and let them know that it can help people that are sick or are suffering from mental disorders, and that this can be good for economic development. However, we want to make it clear that this will not be used for recreational use and we do not support that,” said Delegate Jack.

HEHSC vice chair Council Delegate Norman M. Begay (Alamo, Ramah, Tóhajiilee) said there are other areas of the Navajo Nation codes that need to be amended to ensure the strict regulation of producing cannabis on Navajo land.

Delegate Norman Begay proposed an amendment stating that businesses intending to produce cannabis must first receive approval from the Navajo Nation Council through legislation to approve licensing requirements, policies and procedures, and rules and regulations.

HEHSC members voted 4-0 to approve the amendment.

HEHSC member Council Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty (Beclabito, Cove, Gadi'í'áhi/To'Koi, Red Valley, Tooh Haltsooi, Toadlena/Two Grey Hills, Tsé ahnáož't'í'í) raised concerns over how the production of the controlled substance would affect federal funding the Nation receives.

"I support the use of marijuana in terms of it being used as medicine. I have met patients who have reported that it has helped them with coping with their sicknesses, pain, and mental health. I think we need a leadership meeting to start this dialogue, because we are the policy experts. When we decide to join this industry, it has to be in the best interest of our people," said Delegate Crotty.

Delegate Crotty recommended a directive to hold a future work session, as well as directing the legislation sponsor to work with the Navajo Nation Department of Health and the Title 17 Task Force to develop policies and procedures to monitor, regulate, and license entities who seek to produce cannabis or hemp.

HEHSC member Council Delegate Steven Begay (Coyote Canyon, Mexican Springs, Naschitti, Tohatchi, Bahastl'a'a') reminded his colleagues that they should proceed with caution in approving the production of a "non-Navajo medicine."

"When someone is very sick, that's when Navajo medicine comes into use, and I think we need to be reminded of that. We are opening the door to something that is foreign," said Delegate Steven Begay. "We need to incorporate what the Navajo public wants and we need to allow them the opportunity to provide feedback on this topic. Some may find this drug invasive and addictive."

HEHSC members voted 3-2 to approve Legislation No. 0213-17, with one amendment and one directive. The legislation moves forward to the Resources and Development Committee for further consideration. The Navajo Nation Council serves as the final authority on the bill.

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