



25th Navajo Nation Council

25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Law and Order Committee advocates for enhanced local governance and public safety initiatives



PHOTO: Left to Right: Delegate Cheryl Yazzie, Delegate Nathan Notah, Delegate Steven R. Arviso, and Delegate Herman Daniels, Jr. - Window Rock, AZ

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – The Law and Order Committee (LOC) convened in Window Rock, Ariz., on Wednesday, where they received updates from Richie Nez, Director of the Navajo Nation Office of Hearing and Appeals, and Jarvis Williams, Town Manager for Kayenta Township.

Director Nez addressed the Office of Hearing and Appeal's critical need for advanced recording equipment and upgraded computer systems to enhance legal proceedings. He highlighted the significant staffing shortages, especially the vacant Chief Hearing Officer position, and outlined plans for improving the office's case management infrastructure.

Nez stated that some positions remain vacant due to the lack of housing for employees, lower salaries compared to non-tribal entities, and applicants not meeting requirements.

LOC Vice Chair, Cheryl Yazzie, called for an update from legal counsel on the conditions of appropriations and legislative concerns issued during the FY24 budget session, affecting certain departments and divisions. These concerns included reports on low expenditure rates within departments, impediments to spending ARPA funds, and the utilization of the FMIS 6B process for vendor payments.

Delegate Nathan Notah inquired about the Office of Hearing and Appeals' building budgets, specifically whether the funds would be allocated to their current building or used towards a new facility. Director Nez clarified that the funding would target an existing, currently vacant building, with the challenge being the acquisition of suitable land.

"Our goal is to significantly modernize our operations to ensure the community receives the most efficient service possible," stated Director Nez. "The planned advancements are set to transform how we manage caseloads and enhance support for the community."

In a separate report, Kayenta Township Manager Jarvis Williams discussed the township's successes and challenges, focusing on economic growth, public safety, and essential infrastructure projects. He detailed a significant initiative to construct a new fire department, with an \$8 million funding request from ARPA funds earmarked for this purpose.

Williams outlined five key requirements for township governance: establishing clear boundaries, enforcing strong jurisdiction and law, ensuring a sufficient number of community members, generating adequate revenue, and maintaining robust security measures.

He also addressed the recently passed cemetery and burial regulations, noting the law's vague language and the need for clearer guidelines. Delegate Steven Arviso added that LOC and the Resources and Development Committee will need to work together to develop solutions to address these questions and concerns.

The township plans to establish its own fire department and judicial system to enhance public safety and governance, responding to an increase in local crime and the community's needs.

The "Keep Kayenta Beautiful" campaign was highlighted as part of the township's efforts to maintain high community standards and ensure safe, welcoming spaces for residents and visitors. This includes rebuilding and updating the local playground.

Williams also stressed the importance of cybersecurity measures to protect local businesses and residents. He was also critical of the Navajo Nation Police Department for insufficient communication, which hampers effective community policing.

"We are dedicated to building a safe and resilient Kayenta Township," Williams asserted. "Our strategic approach to public safety and infrastructure improvements is designed to foster long-term community growth and engagement."

Council Delegate Nathan Notah spoke in support of the initiatives, remarking, "The reports from Mr. Nez and Mr. Williams reflect our commitment to enhancing our community's legal and governance frameworks. We must address public safety and judicial efficiency with urgency."

The LOC unanimously approved the reports with a vote of 3 in favor, 0 opposed, and the Vice Chair abstaining.

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