



25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL

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Law and Order Committee engages Sanders community on public safety priorities



Law and Order Committee (LOC) met with community members in Sanders.

SANDERS, Ariz. — In a recent meeting, Law and Order Committee (LOC) met with community members in Sanders to discuss urgent public safety issues and strategies for improving law enforcement capacity across Navajo communities.

During the meeting, LOC Vice Chair Nathan Notah expressed deep appreciation for the commitment of Navajo police officers and emphasized the committee's support for expanding resources and infrastructure.

"Our police officers are the first line of defense for our communities. The Law and Order Committee is committed to taking tangible action that empowers our officers with the training, housing, and support they need," said Vice Chair Notah. He also proposed a public safety fair to encourage youth interest in law enforcement careers and stressed the importance of early education programs.

Sergeant Wallace Billie of the Navajo Police Department outlined several pressing challenges, including critical staffing shortages, aging infrastructure, and the need for increased training in mental and behavioral health response.

Sgt. Billie noted that the Navajo Nation has fewer officers than in previous years, and that cross-jurisdictional certification has become more limited since the closure of the Toyey Police Academy. He urged that the tribe reinstates a regional certification programs and stronger coordination with the Department of Behavioral and Mental Health Services. He also mentioned

the need for school resource officers to protect Navajo students and proposed building housing for officers within each district to reduce response times.

Sgt. Billie also highlighted the frequent mishandling of fireplace ashes, a leading cause of wildfires on the Nation, and called for more public education on proper disposal methods.

Council Delegate Steven Arviso stressed the importance of cultivating interest in public safety careers. "Our next generation needs to understand that being a police officer is not only honorable but vital to the wellbeing of our people," Delegate Arviso said. "We must do everything we can to encourage youth to serve and protect their communities."

During public comment, residents from Sanders, Klagetoh, Houck, and Wide Ruins voiced concerns about law enforcement visibility, emergency response, and youth engagement.

Community members proposed that chapters use local land and ARPA funds to create trailer parks for police housing. They also called for stronger laws to deter repeated offenders and advocated for increased mental health support and grief services, especially in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic.

The community also recommended using social media and school message boards to promote recruitment and public safety information. They also urged the Navajo Housing Authority to allocate vacant homes for officers and requested exploration of funding partnerships to expand mobile housing options.

Council Delegate Arbin Mitchell echoed the need for community-based recruitment and supported further exploration of chapter-led housing solutions. "We must do more to keep officers within the regions they serve," he said. "Our chapters can and should play a greater role in public safety."

The Department of Emergency Management (DEM), led by Director Sharon Sandoval and Coordinator Edmund Tso, gave an overview of their services and emphasized the need for each chapter to develop emergency response plans. They informed the committee and community members that DEM offers training in hazmat response, drought mitigation, CERT certification, and emergency coordination with counties and federal agencies.

Delores Greyeyes, Director of the Navajo Department of Corrections, discussed the ongoing planning for new substations and shared concerns about maintenance staff lacking certification to service modern facilities. She advocated for workforce development to provide programs to ensure internal maintenance capacity.

The LOC concluded the meeting by thanking the Sanders community for providing their recommendation to enhance public safety across the Nation and reaffirmed its commitment to legislative advocacy. The committee promised to work with partner agencies to secure housing for officers, improve training programs, expand behavioral health support, and promote youth engagement in public safety.

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