



25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL

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**Law and Order Committee and Missing and Murdered Diné Relatives Task Force
discuss revisions to Titles 14 and 17 of the Navajo Nation Criminal Code**



The Law and Order Committee and the Missing and Murdered Diné Relatives Task Force met in the Navajo Nation Council Chamber to discuss proposed amendments to Titles 14 and 17.

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — On Wednesday, the Law and Order Committee (LOC) and the Missing and Murdered Diné Relatives (MMDR) Task Force met in the Navajo Nation Council Chamber to discuss proposed amendments to Titles 14 and 17 of the Navajo Nation Criminal Code. The revisions aim to modernize criminal and traffic laws, strengthen protections for victims, and ensure the code reflects current community needs and Diné values.

LOC Chair Eugenia Charles-Newton said the proposed changes are intended to better protect Navajo children and families from violent offenders and to strengthen systems that have historically been ineffective.

“We have a responsibility to ensure our laws are strong, clear, and rooted in Diné values so that victims are protected, offenders are held accountable, and our communities can trust the justice process,” Charles-Newton said.

The discussion focused on a set of proposed revisions developed by the Office of the Prosecutor following consultation with law enforcement officials, victim advocates, service providers, and community partners.

Chief Prosecutor Vernon Jackson and Major Crimes Unit Team Lead Kevin Barnette presented the proposed amendments, which are intended to improve clarity, consistency, and

accountability across the justice system while closing gaps that have left victims without adequate protection.

Members of the MMDR Task Force, including Co-Chair Tatyana Billy and Laurelle Sheppard, program director for Victim Witness Services for Northern Arizona, participated in the discussion. Leadership from the Navajo Police Department and the Division of Public Safety, including Division Director Michael Henderson, also provided input based on victim experiences and challenges related to enforcement and prosecution.

Sheppard offered several recommendations focused on strengthening victim-centered provisions within the criminal code. She emphasized the need for clearer recognition of victims' rights, stronger responses to violent crimes, and improved access to support services for Diné victims.

"Updating these laws is not only about punishment, it is also about dignity, safety, and access to help for victims and their families," Sheppard said. "When the law clearly recognizes the harm caused by these offenses and prioritizes victims' rights, it sends a message that our communities will no longer tolerate violence or remain silent."

The proposed amendments include enhanced protections in family violence and sexual assault cases, expanded use of Domestic Abuse Protection Orders following conviction, and the elimination of the statute of limitations for contact-based sexual offenses against children, allowing prosecution regardless of when the abuse is discovered. The revisions also propose clearer and more accurate naming of offenses to reflect their severity, updates to DUI sentencing provisions to ensure mandatory jail time and escalating penalties for repeat offenders, and technical changes to improve consistency and understanding across the code.

Additional amendments to Title 14 address traffic and public safety concerns, including clarifying penalties for homicide by vehicle and allowing cross-commissioned law enforcement officers to use standard citation forms. These changes are intended to prevent dismissals based on technical paperwork issues and to ensure serious cases, including DUI and fatal collisions, can proceed in Navajo Nation courts.

The LOC and the MMDR Task Force will continue discussion on proposed amendments to the Victims' Rights section at a future meeting.

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