



25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL

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## **Law and Order Committee holds public hearing to Title 17 criminal code amendments**



**Law and Order Committee Chair Eugenia Charles-Newton emphasized the initiative reflects direct community concerns.**

**WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.** — On Monday, the Law and Order Committee convened at the Tohatchi Chapter House to review amendments to Title 17 of the Navajo Nation Code, aimed at strengthening public safety, modernizing criminal statutes, and addressing gaps in prosecution and victim protection across the Navajo Nation.

The amendments introduce new criminal offenses, clarify outdated language, and expand legal definitions to improve case prosecution and victim support. Through collaboration between prosecutors, law enforcement, and community stakeholders, the amendments developed targets both Title 17, the criminal code, and related enforcement provisions, with the goal of aligning Navajo law with the realities faced by communities today.

LOC Committee Chair Eugenia Charles-Newton emphasized the importance of the amendments during the session, noting that the initiative reflects direct community concerns and the need for responsive governance.

“We are reviewing amendments to Title 17 of the criminal code to create a safer Navajo Nation. This discussion represents a coordinated effort to address real gaps in our laws and ensure that justice is accessible and enforceable for our people,” said Charles-Newton.

The amendments include the creation of new offenses such as strangulation or suffocation, possession of drug paraphernalia, voyeurism, and coercion involving harm to pets or livestock.

Prosecutor officials included to expand the legal definition of “family member,” addressing challenges prosecutors face when pursuing domestic violence cases under current statutory limitations.

Council Delegate Arbin Mitchell highlighted the complexity of the proposed changes and the need for careful review as the legislation progresses.

“This is our first public hearing, and we need to carefully review how these amendments are structured and how they will be applied moving forward,” said Mitchell.

Discussions also addressed disparities in statute of limitations, particularly for serious crimes such as homicide and sexual offenses, and introduces reforms to better protect victims of domestic violence. Prosecutors noted that outdated timelines have previously prevented cases from moving forward, especially in situations involving delayed reporting.

LOC Committee Vice Chair Nathan Notah underscored the importance of ensuring clarity and inclusivity within the proposed legal framework.

“We need to make sure that the language we’re adopting clearly applies to all individuals and all cases it’s intended to cover, especially when it comes to protecting families and victims,” said Notah.

In addition to the amendments, the committee discussed expanding cross-jurisdictional authority for emergency enforcement personnel, including Environmental Protection Agency officers, Fish and Wildlife officials, and rangers. This measure aims to improve response times and enforcement capacity in rural areas by allowing trained personnel to conduct reports and detain individuals until law enforcement arrives.

The committee agreed to hold an extended work session to incorporate additional recommendations from environmental and natural resource agencies, ensuring a comprehensive approach before presenting the legislation to the full Navajo Nation Council.

In addition to the amendments, the committee approved a directive mandating coordinated action between the Navajo Nation Office of the Prosecutor, Navajo Nation Ethics and Rules, the Navajo Election Administration, and the Office of Legislative Council to ensure compliance with 17 N.N.C. § 365.

Under the directive, the Office of the Prosecutor is required to screen all candidates who have filed for the 2026 Navajo Nation election, including those seeking the offices of Navajo Nation President, Navajo Nation Vice President, Navajo Nation Council Delegates, Navajo Board of Election Supervisors, Navajo Nation Board of Election, Kayenta Township Commissioners, and Naschitti Chapter Governance Commissioners, with all screenings to be completed on or before the close of business Friday, May 1, 2026. If a candidate is found in violation of Title 17 provisions, the Office of the Prosecutor must immediately notify the Navajo Election Administration.

In a final action, the Law and Order Committee approved the directive requiring the Navajo Nation Office of the Prosecutor, in coordination with the Navajo Election Administration and other entities, for compliance with Title 17 provisions. The directive was adopted with a unanimous vote of three in favor with none opposed, formally advancing the measure for implementation.

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