



25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL

25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Law and Order Committee supports legislation that incorporates restorative justice principles into Navajo education laws



Law and Order Committee supported Legislation No. 0183-26, sponsored by Council Delegate Dr. Andy Nez.

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – On August 31, the Law and Order Committee (LOC) supported Legislation No. 0183-26, following an extensive discussion on school discipline, student rights, parental involvement, and the use of restorative justice practices for Navajo students.

The legislation proposes amendments to Title 10 of the Navajo Nation Code to formally recognize restorative justice principles and practices within the Navajo Nation's education laws.

Council Delegate Arbin Mitchell expressed support for the intent of the legislation while emphasizing that its implementation must be clear to schools, students, and families.

"I'm supporting this legislation because it strengthens protections for Navajo students and incorporates values of accountability, communication, and peacemaking into school discipline," said Delegate Mitchell. "Restorative justice must be more than words; it must be understandable and actionable for students, families, and schools."

Sponsored by Council Delegate Dr. Andy Nez, Legislation No. 0183-26 would amend Sections 3, 106, 107, 108, 116, and 119 of Title 10. It defines restorative justice in relation to the Navajo peacemaking system. It proposes changes to the Navajo Nation Board of Education (NNBOE), Department of Diné Education (DODE), parental involvement, school counseling, and responses to substance and alcohol abuse.

The legislative findings state that incorporating restorative justice into Title 10 is intended to provide clearer direction to schools while supporting student growth, family involvement, cultural identity, accountability, healing, and the restoration of respectful relationships within school communities.

The proposal addresses concerns from Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission's (NNHRC) public hearings with Navajo students and families in Gallup-McKinley County Schools. The 2025 report highlighted issues like cultural recognition, language barriers, discipline, educational resources, and Navajo students' experiences.

During the committee presentation, NNHRC Chair Dr. Wendy S. Greyeyes discussed public hearings and the need to address disciplinary practices affecting Navajo students. She emphasized that restorative justice offers an alternative to exclusionary discipline by focusing on accountability, repairing harm, and restoring relationships, aligned with Navajo peacemaking values.

The amendments would direct the NNBOE, via DODE and in cooperation with the Health, Education and Human Services Committee, to develop procedures for school attendance laws and restorative justice in student codes. DODE could examine disciplinary actions and processes to assess educational programs' impact on Navajo students.

LOC members discussed the importance of ensuring parents, grandparents, and other caregivers understand school disciplinary procedures and have meaningful opportunities to participate when a student faces disciplinary action. The discussion also highlighted the challenges faced by grandparents and relatives who raise children but may lack formal legal guardianship.

LOC Chair Eugenia Charles-Newton raised additional concerns about clearly distinguishing noncriminal school disciplinary matters from serious criminal conduct. She emphasized that restorative justice should not replace law enforcement or criminal justice processes when conduct involves serious violence, weapons, sexual assault, or other criminal acts.

Charles-Newton also discussed victim safety and cautioned against requiring victims to participate in peacemaking or restorative processes when participation may be inappropriate or unsafe.

The LOC discussion covered truancy, curfew enforcement, parental responsibility, guardianship, and possible updates to Title 17 of the Navajo Nation Code. They urged ongoing coordination between education and public safety officials to ensure restorative justice reforms under Title 10 complement, not conflict with, laws on criminal conduct and safety.

Delegate Dr. Nez and Dr. Greyeyes agreed that serious criminal offenses must remain within the appropriate law enforcement process and that the proposed amendments would not impede on them. Further, the NNHRC will work to propose language and related policy issues raised by the committee for amendments in Title 17 and possibly Title 14 of the NN Codes.

The Law and Order Committee supported Legislation No. 0183-26 with three in favor and none opposed. The legislation advances to the Naabik'íyáti' Committee for further consideration.

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