



25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL

25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Law and Order Committee approves five-year contract legislation for Navajo Nation Judicial Branch



Council Delegate Arbin Mitchell, sponsored legislation to accept the proposed five-year 638 contract for the Navajo Nation Judicial Branch.

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — On Monday, the Law and Order Committee (LOC) approved Legislation No. 0212-26, supporting a proposed five-year contract between the Navajo Nation and the U.S. Department of the Interior's Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) to continue funding essential Judicial Branch services.

The contract, authorized under Public Law 93-638, the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act, would cover Jan. 1, 2027, through Dec. 31, 2031, and includes the Judicial Branch-Tribal Courts' fiscal year 2027 annual funding agreement and scope of work.

"Continuing this contract is important to ensuring our Judicial Branch has the resources needed to serve the Navajo people and carry out its responsibilities," said Council Delegate Arbin Mitchell, sponsor of the legislation. "As we move this legislation forward, we also need to make sure the funding is clearly explained, that existing balances are properly accounted for, and that these resources are being used effectively to support our courts and communities."

During the meeting, Navajo Nation Interim Chief Justice Eleanor Shirley provided an overview of the proposed contract and the services it would support. These include tribal court operations, case management, peacemaking, probation and parole services, court personnel, facilities, training, and community outreach.

Chief Justice Shirley explained that the agreement supports coordination among courts, law enforcement, prosecutors, public defenders, and other public safety agencies to improve case handling and access to justice.

LOC Chair Eugenia Charles-Newton reviewed the proposed five-year contract period and emphasized the need to clearly explain the funding structure to the Budget and Finance Committee (BFC). During the discussion, she described the approximately \$25 million as about \$5 million annually over five years and stressed the importance of distinguishing annual funding from the overall contract term.

Committee members also discussed unspent funds carried over from previous years and the restrictions that can affect how those funds are used. Charles-Newton explained that older balances may be subject to specific spending requirements and approved scopes of work, making it difficult for programs to combine available funds or redirect them toward other operational needs.

The chair encouraged Judicial Branch officials to prepare updated financial records, including current account balances, carryover amounts, and spending plans, before presenting the legislation to the BFC. She emphasized that providing this information would help committee members better understand the Judicial Branch's financial needs and the limitations affecting previously allocated funding.

Delegate Mitchell also stressed the need to address outstanding contract balances and work with financial officials to identify ways to use available resources appropriately. Judicial Branch representatives said they are developing an internal spending plan to address remaining balances from previous years.

Another issue raised during the meeting was the need to update the Navajo Law Reporter, which documents Navajo court decisions and legal interpretations. Charles-Newton expressed concern that outdated case-law publications can make it difficult for attorneys, lawmakers, and the public to access current judicial decisions.

The committee also received an update on ongoing litigation concerning federal funding for the Judicial Branch. Chief Justice Shirley explained that the litigation remains pending and that the Judicial Branch continues to operate under its existing funding arrangements. The pending case also affects the ability to make certain changes to the contract's scope of work.

Following the discussion, the Law and Order Committee voted to approve Legislation No. 0212-26, with four in favor and none opposed. The legislation now advances to the Budget and Finance Committee for consideration before proceeding to the Naabik'iyáti' Committee, which has final approval authority.

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