



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Law and Order Committee receives report from Ramah District Court and Police Department

RAMAH, N.M. – On Monday, the Law and Order Committee received a report from the Ramah District Court and Ramah Police Department regarding activities and initiatives within the Ramah Navajo Chapter vicinity, located approximately 55-miles south of Gallup, N.M.

Ramah District Court judge Leonard Livingston reported on the number of caseloads, probation services, juvenile delinquency services, social services, and the need for a district court prosecutor.

“The only major problem we have within the Ramah District Court is the absence of a full-time prosecutor. The number of cases has decreased compared to years before. We see many repeat offenders through the court and correction system. We need a system to deter crime,” stated Livingston.

LOC member Council Delegate Kee Allen Begay, Jr. (Low Mountain, Many Farms, Nazlini, Tachee/Blue Gap, Tselani/Cottonwood) asked what the Navajo Nation Department of Justice’s plan is to fill the vacant position.

“Majority of the district courts within the Nation do not have prosecutors. We have many offenders wandering the streets without prosecution and this is not safe for families and communities. How is NNDOJ handling this issue? How many vacant prosecutor positions are there and how can we encourage people to apply? It is possible for NNDOJ to select temporary prosecutors to do the job until a permanent position is filled?” asked Delegate Begay.

According to Navajo Nation’s new chief prosecutor Gertrude Lee, the need for prosecutors and juvenile presenting officers is a top priority within the Navajo courts. The prosecutor’s office is aggressively recruiting potential candidates and reaching out to law schools but it is difficult to find candidates who have the Navajo Nation Bar Association license, which is required to practice law on the Nation, added Lee.

LOC vice chair Council Delegate Raymond Smith, Jr. (Houck, Klagetoh, Nahata Dziil, Tsé Si áni, Wide Ruins) asked if waiving the Navajo Nation Bar Association requirement from the prosecutor’s job description would provide a solution to fill all vacant positions.

Following Ramah District Court's report, Ramah Police Department chief of police Derrick Soland provided information regarding public safety services, administrative building deficiencies, structure of the new correction facility, number of arrests and response calls, and the need for additional funding for police officer pay raises.

LOC member Council Delegate Herman Daniels, Jr. (Shonto, Naa'tsis'Áán, Oljato, Ts'ah Bii Kin) stated that the Ramah Police Department needs to be included in the conversation to plan for increasing police officer salaries.

"All Navajo Nation police officers need pay adjustments. They put their lives on the line everyday to keep our communities safe. The committee needs to support all efforts for public safety," stated Delegate Daniels.

According to Navajo Nation Division of Public Safety executive director Jesse Delmar, Ramah Police Department has a 638 Contract with the Bureau of Indian Affairs that is separate from the 638 Contract with NNDPS.

Delegate Begay added that the committee can assist Ramah Police Department to request more funding for police officers' pay adjustments from the BIA.

At the end of the meeting, LOC chair Council Delegate Edmund Yazzie (Churchrock, Iyanbito, Mariano Lake, Pinedale, Smith Lake, Thoreau) recommended the Ramah District Court to provide a written report to the committee and an update report from the chief prosecutor regarding vacant positions.

The Law and Order Committee approved all reports with a 3-0 vote with a directive to meet with the BIA, Navajo Nation Office of Management and Budget Contract Section, and Ramah Police Department regarding police officers' pay adjustments.

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