



Law and Order Committee receives public safety responses on Tohajiilee law enforcement services

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WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — Members of the Law and Order Committee (LOC) of the 24th Navajo Nation Council received responses from the Navajo Nation Division of Public Safety (DPS) regarding police and emergency response services at the Tohajiilee Chapter in New Mexico on Nov. 23. The report, given by DPS Executive Director Jesse Delmar and DPS staff, was requested by Council Delegate Jamie Henio (Alamo, Ramah, Tóhajiilee) and Tohajiilee Chapter officials after a recent community meeting took place on vandalism in the community and a lack of public health order enforcement.

“We need your help, Mr. Delmar,” stated Henio. “How do we work with the community at Tohajiilee and the chapter officials there to bring forth some sort of peace and comfort to them when it comes to public safety?” The coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic, in particular, has exacerbated the need for police presence in Tohajiilee and Alamo to reduce movement in and out of the communities.

LOC Chair Eugenia Charles-Newton (Shiprock) added recent news coverage of issues Tohajiilee faces due to insufficient law enforcement services prompted a meeting with Henio, local officials and herself in the community on Nov. 19.

“They also had their water truck that they deliver water with, two individuals came and cut out the catalytic converters from the truck,” said Charles-Newton. The truck was parked at a health care facility when it was vandalized. In response, local chapter officials indicated private security personnel would be hired to patrol the health care property.

“This community, right now, is suffering from the lack of public safety coverage and we have started talks about how Council can assist both Tohajiilee and also Alamo,” said Charles-Newton.

Delmar explained DPS, through the Navajo Police Department, currently alternates its Crownpoint Police District personnel to provide coverage to Tohajiilee and Alamo. “That is Navajo Nation jurisdiction and it is our responsibility to provide services,” said Delmar. “We try our best to accommodate those communities with our services the best we can.”

Captain Martin Page indicated law enforcement across the Crownpoint Police District has been impacted by the pandemic, stating: “Manpower is short. We do have one sergeant that is assigned out there. There’s also another officer that is assigned out there. The other two we had assigned out there did resign.” Page added, in the most recent police academy class, four individuals were from the Alamo and Tohajiilee areas but none made it to the point of completion.

“So we are in the process of trying to build up the man power out there,” stated Page.

Delmar acknowledged the long-standing effort by the communities to establish a substation for law enforcement services, stating, “I know it’s been so long now that the people there in Tohajiilee and Alamo—there’s an outcry.”

Sergeant Tommy Rogers with the Crownpoint Police District reported 17 commissioned police officers currently servicing the entire district, in addition to five sergeants. The district has six personnel serving during its first and second shifts and seven personnel serving during the third shift. Two personnel are specifically assigned to Tohajiilee and Alamo.

Jimmy Secatero of Tohajiilee stated: “Everybody gets pulled from out here in Tohajiilee and Alamo and they get sent to other parts of the district, wherever they’re needed. But, our response time when somebody calls from Tohajiilee to Crownpoint is at least three to four hours, if not they don’t come at all.”

Nearly a week ago, Secatero reported the Laguna Police Department, Bernalillo County sheriffs and New Mexico State Police responded to a head-on vehicular collision in the community. It wasn’t until approximately four hours after the incident that Navajo Nation police responded.

“This same conversation started back before the 22nd Council,” said Secatero. Delmar indicated support for law enforcement facilities, noting that it will require further discussion and collaboration with the LOC, Tohajiilee and Alamo communities, and the DPS.

The report included discussion from committee members and DPS on policy issues relating to Tohajiilee, Alamo and the Navajo Nation’s satellite communities.

Relating to internal personnel policies and procedures, Page reviewed a specific issue with the personnel action form (PAF) required for all Navajo Nation employees, including newly-certified Navajo police officers. PAFs currently indicate worksites specific to certain communities, instead of allowing for the entire Navajo Nation to be assigned as a proper worksite. “When the worksite is specific to a district, people have the ability to grieve” when they do not receive an assignment they do not like, reported Page.

Delmar also shared with the committee the Laguna Police Department has expressed interest in discussing a possible memorandum of agreement between the two tribes. He also indicated DPS often works in partnership with other law enforcement agencies when Navajo personnel are limited or in the process of responding to other areas.

Council Delegate Otto Tso (Tónaneesdizi) expressed his support of a substation for the Tohajiilee and Alamo communities, noting: “Support for facilities in their area is very slim. It’s going to need a lot of attention.” However, stated Tso, the added facilities will eventually require recurring revenues to support staff and administration, an issue that will ultimately need to be addressed by the Council.

Tso further stressed the importance of teaching accountability and holding family members and relatives responsible for abiding by the law and public health orders. In the case of recruitment, Tso said there are reasons an individual can fail a background check that relate to personal accountability.

Relating to the Alamo Chapter, Henio shared that, before the pandemic caused the shut-down of the Navajo Nation’s offices, progress was underway in identifying resources for schematics for a law enforcement facility in Alamo. He indicated land has already been identified and withdrawn for the facility’s use, acknowledging a facility like the Twin Arrows public safety complex may be appropriate for the site. That complex also included a fire response substation.

The report also included discussion concerning the reasons provided by personnel who resigned from the DPS. Charles-Newton expressed an interest in understanding how the program can be improved for law enforcement personnel, in addition to boosting recruitment and retention.

LOC accepted the report with a vote of 3 in favor, 0 opposed and 2 not voting.

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