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CHIEF JUSTICE HIGHLIGHTS JUDICIAL BRANCH WORK IN REPORT TO COUNCIL

Chief Justice JoAnn B. Jayne provided the Judicial Branch’s quarterly report for Fiscal Year 2024 Third Quarter to the Navajo Nation Council on the first day of the summer session July 15, 2024.

The Chief Justice highlighted the work of the judicial districts and programs from the previous quarter, which runs April 1, 2024 to June 30, 2024. She noted that Kayenta Judicial District has planned a mobile court for Navajo Mountain and Inscription House to be held July 19, 2024. With the mobile court, the judicial district takes its services out to chapters within its service area where the public is able to inquire about case status, make fine payments, file a new case or learn about the Peacemaking Program.

Chief Justice also said that Window Rock Judicial District judges and staff are developing new legal notices for publication requirements to lessen the financial burden on the public and that Crownpoint Judicial District is working to provide legal educational resources to pro se litigants. Pro se litigants are those who represent themselves in court.

“I want to personally thank our staff who know their work is not just a job but true public service,” she said.

The Judicial Branch has 186 employees who keep the Branch running every day, she explained. There are currently 10 judges serving 13 district courts and 13 family courts across the Navajo Nation. In addition, there are three judicial hearing officers who assist with shelter care and domestic violence hearings. The Judicial Branch is also comprised of the Supreme Court, as well as 12 Probation and Parole Services sites and 12 Peacemaking districts.

The Chief Justice recognized the resiliency of the Judicial Branch staff who work to achieve the Branch’s mission despite its limited budget.

“We are aware of the ones we serve who are affected by these limited resources. Regardless, the Branch is looking forward to these next few months in working cooperatively with both the Legislative and Executive Branch to improve the Branch’s resources to serve the public,” she said.

Chief Justice Jayne also explained the clearance rate of cases filed in Fiscal Year 2024 third quarter. There were 3,242 cases filed in all Navajo courts and 4,494 cases closed. This resulted in a 139% clearance rate of all cases.

“In the court systems, a clearance rate is identified as the number of outgoing cases as a percentage of the number of incoming cases. This rate identifies how effective a court is at handling incoming caseload and clearing backlogged cases,” she said.

Chief Justice Jayne said the Branch will begin calculating clearance rates on a monthly basis for each district and family court to ensure that the judicial system is efficient and responsive to the needs of the people.

She also highlighted the efforts by the Peacemaking Program and Probation and Parole Services in incorporating traditional concepts into their work and updating their plans of operations and standard operating procedures to improve operations and enhance services to all communities.

In addition, Chief Justice Jayne reported several updates regarding judicial facilities. She said that the expenditure plan for the *Hashkééjį Nahat’á Béeso Bá Hooghan* has been completed and submitted for legislative action. The expenditure plan includes multiple projects including the first Navajo Peacemaking facility in Window Rock, Ariz., and the Aneth judicial complex in Aneth, Utah. Window Rock Judicial District is also working to open a new facility in Fort Defiance, Ariz., after being without a building for more than 8 years. Kayenta Judicial District is planning to begin construction on its new judicial complex.

Chief Justice emphasized the importance of judicial independence in her remarks. “Judicial independence allows us to make decisions based on justice and fairness, free from external pressures and influence,” she said.

Chief Justice Jayne finished her remarks by requesting favorable consideration of the Branch’s Fiscal Year 2025 budget. “Adequate funding is vital to continue our progress, improve our facilities, and ensure that we can effectively serve the Navajo Nation,” she said.

The text of the Chief Justice's full remarks and the Judicial Branch's FY 2024 Third Quarterly Report are available on the <https://courts.navajo-nsn.gov> website.

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