

Navajo Nation establishes new criminal penalties for domestic animal attacks

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WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez and Vice President Myron Lizer signed Resolution No. CAP-16-22 into law amending Title 17 of the Navajo Nation Code, which establishes criminal penalties for owners of free-roaming dogs and other animals that attack people May 9.

The resolution, passed by the 24th Navajo Nation Council on April 19, is intended to deter animal attacks and increase accountability for animal owners.

“With the signing of this bill, we are committing to holding animal owners accountable for animal attacks so that victims and survivors receive justice for their injuries and trauma, but this will also require the Judicial Branch to do their part if individuals are charged under the new penalties,” Nez said. “We have many court cases and filings that have been delayed by the pandemic and we look to the Judicial Branch to move those matters forward. As Navajo People, our livestock and pets are a part of our families, and we have to ensure that they do not harm our homes and communities. As pet owners, we have to train and socialize our animals so that people, especially children, are safe in all communities.”

According to the Navajo Nation Animal Control Program, approximately 3,000 animal-related injuries were reported last year on the Navajo Nation. The amended law specifies dog attacks as a criminal nuisance and establishes increased maximum fines and prison sentences penalties for dog owners responsible for vicious animal attacks.

The maximum fine amount is \$1,000 and a maximum prison sentence of 30 days, whereas the previous amount was \$500. In addition, if found guilty, a pet owner will pay restitution for any costs incurred by the victims due to any physical or mental injury or death.

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“Beyond the Navajo Nation Animal Control Program is the broader subject of public education and prevention,” Nez said. “Through spaying, neutering, and vaccination, responsible pet stewardship can reduce the population of strays that wander and become aggressive due to the lack of care and socialization. Our Navajo culture teaches us that we must respect, preserve, and protect all life forms, including our animals.”

First Lady Phefelia Nez and Second Lady Dottie Lizer continue to work with non-profit groups to offer more affordable spay/neuter and vaccine services for animal owners. The Navajo Nation Veterinary Program also offers animal services. More information is available on their website at: <https://www.navajoveterinaryprogram.com/index.html> .