

Chief Justice Jayne delivers Quarterly Report to Navajo Nation Council

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Chief Justice JoAnn Jayne delivered her quarterly message to the Navajo Nation Council on the first day of the summer session on July 20. In her message, she outlined the Judicial Branch's response to the public health emergency due to COVID-19. The Judicial Branch had to immediately take protective measures by restricting travel, approving teleworking for certain employees, and quickly developing methodical processes for continued operations of essential services.

"The safety of our employees is our number one priority and the safety of the public is also our number one priority," Jayne said. "We knew right away that we had to provide stability, we had to provide adjustments, we had to provide accountability, we had to provide security, and we had to provide essential services and most of all, we had to provide safety for our employees."

The doors to the courts were closed to protect the public and employees, she said. This was done by administrative order March 27.

Despite the doors being closed, services to the Navajo People continue, she noted. All courts continue to provide essential services and accept all filings.

Jayne explained that the Judicial Branch put together a Continuity of Operations Plan in

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response to the public health emergency. The plan was necessary due to the Judicial Branch's role in maintaining and preserving the rule of law even during an emergency. It ensures that essential operations of the Judicial Branch courts and programs remain functioning in the event of an emergency, including a public health emergency.

With much of the Judicial Branch staff teleworking, the branch soon realized that it lacked necessary computer equipment for staff to efficiently work remotely. While the doors to the courts have been closed, Jayne said that the courts and programs were able to assess their buildings and determine the needs for modifications to increase safety for the public and employees. These types of assessments are the basis for the funding requests that the Judicial Branch has put forth.

The chief justice also announced that the Judicial Branch is currently working on a Roadmap to Return to Full Capacity that will allow the courts and programs to expand services beyond the essential services currently being offered. The roadmap will allow each court and program to tailor its plan to expand services in phases to meet the unique needs of their area and take into account the local developments regarding COVID-19 cases, including possible increases in the number of cases.

The report was accepted by the Navajo Nation Council with a vote of 19-0.

The Judicial Branch's Fiscal Year 2020 Third Quarterly Report can be found at www.navajocourts.org.