



## OFFICE OF NAVAJO NATION HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

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### **Immediate Release:**

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### **Navajo Nation upholds Voting Rights Act standards for Redistricting Maps**

**St. Michaels, Navajo Nation (ARIZ)** – The Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission (“Commission”) presented to New Mexico Indian Affairs Committee (“IAC”) in the Pueblo of Jemez, New Mexico on Navajo Nation redistricting maps for the House, Senate, and Public Education Commission. The Commission emphasized to representatives from the IAC that the principles for redistricting in the Voting Rights Act takes presidency when drawing districts.

The redistricting efforts for the Navajo Nation is to keep the same minority majority Native American districts in the House and Senate. In the House, the minority majority districts are 4, 5, 6, 9, 65, 69. In the Senate, the minority majority districts are 4, 3, 22. The Navajo Nation submitted finalized maps for the Northwest region on October 8, 2021 during the final meeting with New Mexico Citizens Redistricting Committee. Navajo Nation’s final maps preservation the Native American minority majority districts and include one influence district in the House and two influence districts in the Senate. The establishment of the influence districts allow Native Americans to bring issues to potential candidates that can sway an election in favor of Native American issues.

In a meeting on October 11<sup>th</sup>, Navajo Nation leaders both President Jonathan Nez and Speaker Seth Damon along with staff from the Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission met with a number of Pueblo governors and the Jicarilla Apache tribe at the All Indian Pueblo Council of Governors complex in Albuquerque, NM. During this meeting Navajo Nation leaders did not approve to lower Native American Voting Age Population (“NAVAP”) for the House Districts. However, a consensus was reached with the Senate map for the Northwest corner of New Mexico.

One of many concerns for the Commission has expressed is the under count of the 2020 census on the Navajo Nation. With the census data used to develop voting districts, the Commission has incorporated the use a floating deviation to reach the 64% NAVAP, which is allowable in New Mexico law. The floating 10 deviation allows districts to be drawn below a -5 deviation. Navajo’s House and Senate maps lowest deviation reaches a -6.9 thus preservation the minority majority districts needed for Navajos to elect a candidate of their choice. In New Mexico districts are drawn using precinct boundaries from each county to build voting districts. McKinley County Commissioners passed a resolution to align and amendment its precinct boundaries with Navajo Chapter boundaries precinct boundaries in the county. With this new alignment Navajo voter participation should increase, as they will not be required to travel in different locations to cast their ballots. Unlike San Juan County, where Commissioners denied aligning precinct

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boundaries with chapter boundaries voters will continue to crisscross districts to vote for Navajo and State/Federal elections. It is really unfortunate that San Juan County ignored the recommendations of the Northern Navajo chapters to alleviate one challenge Navajo voters are confronted with.

The All Pueblos Council of Governors (“APCG”) and Jicarilla Apache expressed concerns on the right of self-determination and each nation’s right to sovereignty. The APCG’s based their redistricting maps on self-determination which lower the VRA standard of retrogression to a NAVAP between a 60% and 65%. Pueblo plans allows for retrogression and lowers the standards for future generations to build upon redistricting practices. The proposed maps from APCG does not provide the guarantee for Navajo voters to elect a candidate of their choice in the future.

Maintaining the standards of the VRA guarantees States must comply with Federal laws to protect Navajo citizens voting rights and the ability to elect a candidate for their choice. “with the uncertainty of the Navajo population increasing or decreasing in the future dictates now, the Navajo Nation preserve the VRA standards for future indigenous generations. I cannot underscore the significant impact our position has on future elections. We must continue to advocate for the current Native American districts in hopes of building more Native American districts in the future.” said Leonard Gorman, Executive Director of Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission.

Gorman, further states “Navajo Voters carry the voting weight of the Indigenous people in the northwest quadrant of New Mexico. We cannot allow another sovereign government to tell us how we should design our districts for their benefit.”

For more information for contact the Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission at 928-871-7436 or visit the Commission website to see the finalized New Mexico maps and the Indigenous consensus Senate map at [www.nnhrc.navajo-nsn.gov](http://www.nnhrc.navajo-nsn.gov).

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