



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Navajo Nation recommends approval of New Mexico House and Senate bills

WINDOW ROCK— The Navajo Nation Council’s Naabik’iyátí’ Committee on Thursday officially issued its support for the approval of several New Mexico Senate and House bills, which are currently making their way through the New Mexico State Legislature.

Council Delegate Jonathan Hale (Oak Springs, St. Michaels) sponsored four separate legislations in support of the bills including Senate Bill 72 and House Bills 36 and 24, which seek to cap interest rates for small loans at 36% throughout the state of New Mexico.

Currently, New Mexico does not place a limit on interest rates for loan companies, which has led to very high interest rates for individuals who apply and receive small loans.

“The purpose of supporting these bills is to protect Navajo people, especially the elderly, from payday loan companies that often charge extremely high interest rates,” stated Delegate Hale.

During the discussion, Council Delegate Nelson BeGaye (Lukachukai, Rock Point, Round Rock, Tsaile/Wheatfields, Tsé Ch’ izhi) said that although he supports the bills, he believes the proposed 36% cap is still too high especially for low income Navajo people who often rely on the loans.

Committee members also approved an amendment proposed by Council Delegate Edmund Yazzie (Churchrock, Iyanbito, Mariano Lake, Pinedale, Smith Lake, Thoreau) to recommend language to prohibit loan companies from requesting personal documents such as birth certificates and a Certificate of Indian Blood, when applying for loans.

“I’ve been hearing that businesses around Gallup are taking copies of CIB’s and birth certificates when people are getting loans,” Delegate Yazzie said. “We need to say to these businesses that it’s not right.”

Council Delegate Jonathan Nez (Shonto, Naa’tsis’Áán, Oljato, Ts’ah Bii Kin) recommended that the Navajo Nation develop a “better business bureau” to address consumer concerns.

“The bureau could also provide training to business owners off the Navajo Nation for the purpose of protecting our Navajo citizens,” stated Delegate Nez.

The proposed law would go into effect on July 1 if approved by the state legislature.

Naabik’iyátí’ Committee members also approved Legislation No. 0020-15, supporting Senate Bill 2 which seeks a \$500,000 appropriation to the state’s Tribal College Dual Credit Program, to benefit Navajo high school students who enroll in college courses.

New Mexico law requires post-secondary institutions to waive tuition and fees for dual enrollment students which include tribal colleges.

According to the bill, the \$500,000 appropriation would compensate tribal colleges for foregone revenue due to the waiver of tuition and fees by colleges for high school students who enroll in college courses.

The Navajo Nation also supports House Bill 51, seeking to require the New Mexico Children, Youth, and Families Department to provide written notice “as soon as possible” to relatives when a Navajo child is taken into protective custody.

The law would also require that placement preference be given to relatives that meet standards, such as having no pending criminal charges and no previous domestic violence convictions.

Naabik’iyáti’ Committee members also voted in support of Senate Bill 79, appropriating \$900,000 to the New Mexico Department of Health for county and tribal health councils for the purpose of identifying and addressing local community health needs.

Following Thursday’s meeting, Speaker LoRenzo Bates (Nenahnezad, Newcomb, San Juan, Tiis Tsoh Sikaad, Tse’Daa’Kaan, Upper Fruitland) said he believes the committee’s support of the state bills is indicative of the new Council’s eagerness to be more involved at the state level.

“Today’s actions are in line with this Council’s willingness to be more involved in advocating and addressing issues at the state level,” said Speaker Bates, who expressed his support for recommendations by Council members to establish taskforces to focus on issues at the state level in New Mexico, Arizona, and Utah.

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