



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Health, Education, and Human Services Committee approves funding for the St. Michaels Association for Special Education, Inc.

WINDOW ROCK – The Health, Education, and Human Services Committee on Wednesday approved Legislation No. 0201-15, a Navajo Nation grant and supplemental funding in the amount of \$2.4 million from the Undesignated, Unreserved Fund for the St. Michaels Association for Special Education, Inc.

For over 40 years, the SMASE, Inc. program has been a non-profit organization that provides educational, residential, medical, and therapeutic services to Navajo children and adults with mental and physical developmental disabilities.

Legislation sponsor Council Delegate Jonathan Hale (Oak Springs, St. Michaels) said the SMASE, Inc. program is experiencing a shortfall in its budget for the current fiscal year, which has resulted in limited services.

“The SMASE, Inc. program needs a one-time supplemental funding to restore their transportation services, educational programs, renovate old buildings that currently do not meet code standards, reinstate their staff back to full-time, continue the transitional program for adult disabled clients, and further the autistic support program,” said Delegate Hale.

Delegate Hale added that the SMASE, Inc. program has garnered support through several chapter resolutions from different agencies on the Navajo Nation. Additionally, a grant proposal submitted to the Navajo Nation Office of Budget and Management met all the requirements for grant and supplemental funding.

In support of the legislation, HEHSC member Council Delegate Nelson BeGaye (Lukachukai, Rock Point, Round Rock, Tsaille/Wheatfields, Tsé Ch' izhi) said Navajo Nation leaders often overlook special needs programs and that it is important to remind them of their responsibility to provide persons with disabilities with the best education and care possible.

“I want to thank Delegate Hale for bringing this legislation to us. We need to find it in our hearts to keep this program going and provide them with the funding that is needed. These individuals are precious and we cannot allow these services to falter,” said Delegate BeGaye. “As a relative to a person with special needs, this matter is very dear to my heart.”

HEHSC member Council Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty (Beclabito, Cove, Gadi'i'áhi/To'Koi, Red Valley, Tooh Haltsooi, Toadlena/Two Grey Hills, Tsé alnáoz't'l'i) recommended that the Navajo Nation Division of Human Resources should create an option for employees to issue tax-deductible donations to different causes on the Navajo Nation.

“There should be an option for Navajo Nation employees to donate to different causes such as the SMASE, Inc. program. If an employee wants to donate a part of their salary to organizations, they should be provided that option. That discussion needs to take place,” said Delegate Crotty.

According to the presentation provided by the SMASE, Inc. program, the organization receives funding from the Bureau of Indian Education, Arizona Public Schools, Arizona State DDD, Navajo Nation Division of Family Services, Navajo Nation Growing in Beauty, and public donations.

The program also provides day treatment services for adults and an education program for children, as well as 14 group homes on and off campus. Care givers are responsible for management of their clients' health care, education, development of independent and social skills, and community involvement.

Delegate Hale stressed that the services do not benefit just one community, but it serves all families on the Navajo Nation who are in need of assistance with special needs family members.

“I hope we can receive support from President [Russell] Begaye and Vice President [Jonathan] Nez. With the many supporting chapter resolutions attached to the legislation, it is apparent that this is a critical need throughout the Navajo Nation,” said Delegate Hale.

At the conclusion of the discussion, HEHSC members voted unanimously to approve Legislation No. 0201-15 with a vote of 5-0. The legislation will go to the Budget and Finance Committee for consideration next. The Navajo Nation Council serves as the final authority on the bill.

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