



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Council approves supplemental funding for Phoenix Indian Center

WINDOW ROCK – On the fourth day of the 2016 Summer Council Session, members considered Legislation No. 0161-16, which seeks approximately \$148,000 from the Unreserved, Undesignated Fund Balance to be allocated to the Phoenix Indian Center to be utilized for the operation of the Navajo-based programs at the center.

The Phoenix Indian Center is a non-profit organization located in Maricopa County, Arizona. The center assists American Indians living within the urban community with services including employment, educational resources, cultural enrichment, and community engagement services.

Legislation sponsor Council Delegate Jonathan Hale said that Navajo people make up approximately 30-percent of the urban Indian population in Phoenix, and the funding would be specific to Navajo programs and resources.

He added that the funding would go toward social services for Navajo people at the center, which includes Navajo language and culture classes, seminars, and informational sessions. A portion of the funding will fund staff who will provide the services.

Council Delegate Otto Tso emphasized the importance of providing language and cultural programs to Navajo citizens living off the Navajo Nation.

“A lot of Navajo live in Phoenix and they utilize the services at the center. That is why I think it is important to provide funding to them. It would also be good to do a visit down there and see the services they offer and visit our Navajo people there. We can see what they are learning and how they’re staying connected to our Diné culture,” said Delegate Tso.

Delegate Tso also touched on the homeless issue in Maricopa County, and suggested that the center begin keeping track of data on displaced Navajo people and families. He added that the center should start to reach out to those populations to begin helping them reintegrate back into stable living conditions and offer resources for employment.

Phoenix Indian Center program manager Jolyana Begay informed Council that the center provides quarterly reports to the Navajo Nation, collects data on all participants utilizing the Navajo program, and will continue to make Navajo families a priority.

“What makes our program particularly unique is that we are tribe-specific. I can’t stress enough how awesome it is to have our own Diné language classes. The classes are open to urban Navajo families, and there are non-Navajo individuals that do inquire about Navajo classes. However, they make up less than two-percent of our participants. We do allow non-Navajo families to participate, but only in particular times,” said Begay.

Council Delegate Raymond Smith, Jr. commended the program for promoting the learning of the Navajo language, but suggested that language classes that individuals complete should be counted as college credits that can be transferred to colleges and universities, or be provided a certificate of completion.

In agreement, Council Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty stressed the importance of ensuring that the teaching of Navajo culture and language continues to be offered to Diné citizens residing in urban areas.

“I understand that our Navajo people living off the reservation want to stay connected to their language and heritage. I suggest that we not only approve the supplemental funding, but I believe this should be embedded into our Nation’s annual budget,” said Delegate Crotty.

She added that the Phoenix Indian Center should also assist families and children who have been subjected to the Indian Child and Welfare Act—to keep Navajo children with their families and people. Delegate Crotty suggested that the center begin monitoring ICWA cases and aid families when needed.

Council Delegate Kee Allen Begay, who serves on the Law and Order Committee, noted the shortage of police officers on the Navajo Nation and suggested that the Phoenix Indian Center create a partnership with local colleges and universities in the area to entice Navajo students to consider careers in law enforcement and criminal justice.

“The Law and Order Committee is doing what they can to hire officers and judges on the Nation, but I believe the center can create some sort of curriculum to get students interested in those fields and to come back to Navajo to fill those positions,” said Delegate Begay.

He also suggested that the Law and Order Committee meet with the center to begin devising ways to shape the curriculum and help guide the creation of the partnerships needed to initiate the program.

Council members voted 18-0 to unanimously approve Legislation No. 0161-16. President Russell Begay will have 10 calendar days to consider the legislation once the resolution is sent to the Office of the President and Vice President.

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