



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Health, Education, and Human Services Committee receives report from senior centers regarding issues with Chinle NAAA

TSÉLANÍ/COTTONWOOD, Ariz. – The Health, Education, and Human Services Committee met on Monday at the Tséłani/Cottonwood Chapter to discuss issues regarding the Chinle Navajo Area Agency on Aging program and how some services have been disrupted at 16 chapter areas that the program services in the Central Navajo Agency.

According to a report prepared by chapters and Council Delegate Kee Allen Begay, Jr. (Low Mountain, Many Farms, Nazlini, Tachee/Blue Gap, Tselani/Cottonwood), some of the concerns that were brought up were personnel payroll and work hours, non-payment of utility bills at the senior centers, inefficient food storage, staff paying for equipment repairs out-of-pocket and not being reimbursed, and the program manager position not being permanently filled.

HEHSC chair Council Delegate Jonathan Hale (Oak Springs, St. Michaels) said the ongoing issues that Navajo Area Agency on Aging continues to face is a result of the sanctioned-status they are currently in, and that the deficiencies have not been addressed effectively.

“What can be done to show the seriousness of this sanction that would include the director and the program managers? It is getting serious. If no one is going to change his or her ways, then maybe that needs to happen to sanction the managers. Maybe this money needs to be given to the chapters to pay the bills directly, and have no more payments made by Navajo Area Agency if these important expenses are not being paid for,” said Delegate Hale.

Delegate Hale suggested a recommendation to the committee to request for a performance audit of the elderly service program to determine exactly what the issues are that are hindering direct services, and to make an addition to the sanction to withhold 20-percent of the program director and manager’s salaries until the program has been taken out of the sanction status.

According to the Navajo Nation Office of the Auditor General, it was reported that funding has not been withheld from the Navajo Area Agency on Aging program, although it is common for the Auditor General to withhold 10-percent of a sanctioned programs overall budget and withhold 20-percent of the program managers salaries.

In 2004, an audit was carried out for the Navajo Area Agency on Aging and a Corrective Action Plan was created, in which the Auditor General did follow-up on the CAP for 2006, 2008, and 2010. As of 2010, seven deficiencies still needed to be corrected and continues to contribute to the elderly service program's ongoing sanction status, states the report from the Office of the Auditor General.

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) pointed out to committee members that veterans and education receive an annual set-aside, and recommended a directive to devise a way to also create a set-aside for the Navajo Area Agency on Aging.

"The elders want activities beyond just food. In terms of the Navajo Nation, that's something we have to look at and see the rights of elders and their rights to have access to a variety of services. I want to make the directive to develop a proposal for a set-aside budget, and to have the draft come back in two weeks," said Delegate Crotty.

In addition to the directive, Delegate Begay requested an investigation into personnel hours, reimbursements, proper food storage, food purchasing, and specifically how the program will work to fix these issues. Delegate Hale also informed the committee he would make a formal request for a performance audit that would include amending the sanction stipulations of the program.

HEHSC members voted 4-0 to accept the report.

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