



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Health, Education, and Human Services Committee seeks to increase funding advocacy for Navajo individuals with disabilities'

WINDOW ROCK – The Health, Education, and Human Services Committee met with the Navajo Independent Service Providers organization, or NISP, on Monday, which is a consortium of non-profit service providers who support and aid Navajo individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities that reside throughout the Navajo Nation.

According to the report from NISP, the organization educates, collaborates, and provides direct delivery of dignified services to the intellectually and developmentally disabled Navajo population through each of the Navajo-managed service providers.

The report raised concerns regarding a decrease in funding and reimbursement rates by the Arizona Department of Economic Security's Division of Developmental Disabilities, who fund a network of qualified vendors responsible for the delivery of services. The funding is a state appropriation and includes a federal match, and the funding accounts for about 75-percent of NISP member organization's overall funding.

HEHSC chair Council Delegate Jonathan Hale (Oak Springs, St. Michaels) said that the organization, as well as other health entities on the Navajo Nation, should approach the committee with a drafted position statement to provide tribal leadership direction to advocate for policy changes and funding.

"I would gather information and share it with this committee before the negotiation. I would think the state and federal entities would want to see something from Navajo leadership. We need to know what's going on so we can drop a legislation to establish an official position. We did that with the veterans issue—we came up with a plan and we started to the fix issues, so your program needs to do the same," said Delegate Hale.

He added that because NISP is comprised of independent services providers, they would need to work closely with the Navajo Nation Division of Social Services and the Navajo Nation Department of Health to develop a plan to begin addressing funding shortfalls and appropriate reimbursements for services rendered.

The NISP was established in the early 1970's as an advisory council to the then Navajo Tribal Council, and continues to collectively advocate for policy changes that result in value-added-benefits to individuals with disabilities, their families, and Navajo communities.

Service providers that make up the NISP consortium include Diné Bii' Association of Disabled Citizens, Inc., Toyei Industries, Inc., Chinle Valley School, Inc., Annie Wauneka Life Care, Inc., St. Michaels Association for Special Education, Inc., Coyote Canyon Rehabilitation Center, Inc., and the Tohatchi Area of Opportunity and Service, Inc.

HEHSC member Council Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty (Beclabito, Cove, Gadi'i'áhi/To'Koi, Red Valley, Tooh Haltsooi, Toadlena/Two Grey Hills, Tsé ałnáoz't'í) recommended that Navajo leadership consider creating a fund that would fund the service providers and reimburse them directly for services, and the Nation would receive the reimbursement from the federal government.

"If the federal government is delaying payment to these vital service providers, as leadership we can create a cash-match fund or a reimbursement pool, something similar to what we did with the [Navajo Nation Head Start], and the Nation would be reimbursed directly," said Delegate Crotty.

Delegate Crotty urged the programs to consult with the HEHSC before renegotiating contracts and reimbursement rates, and said the Office of the President and Vice President needs to work with the programs when renegotiating the rates and to include the committee.

HEHSC members voted 3-0 to accept the report.

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