



## 23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **MEDIA CONTACTS**

Jared Touchin (928) 221-9253  
Jolene Holgate (928) 380-4174  
Crystalyne Curley (928) 286-7918  
nnlb.communications@gmail.com

### **Health, Education, and Human Services Committee receives report on Kayenta domestic violence shelter**

**WINDOW ROCK** – On Monday, the Health, Education, and Human Services Committee received a report regarding the status of the Tohdenasshai Shelter Home regarding their unmet needs, staffing, and maintenance issues. The Tohdenasshai Committee Against Family Abuse, which serves as the oversight for the domestic violence shelter located in Kayenta, provided the report.

The Tohdenasshai Shelter Home is a 501(3)c non-profit organization that has been in operation since 1982, and is currently one of two shelters that offers emergency shelter services for victims of domestic violence on the Navajo Nation. The mission of the shelter is to provide a safe shelter for victims of abuse and to meet the physical and emotional needs of their clients.

According to the report, within the last year the shelter carried out nearly 14,370 hours of public education and presentations regarding domestic violence, and provided shelter services to approximately 118 women, 159 children, and 14 men. The shelter receives grant funding from the Navajo Nation Strengthening Families Program and the Arizona Department of Health Services.

HEHSC member Council Delegate Nathaniel Brown (Chilchinbeto, Dennehotso, Kayenta), who has visited the shelter several times, said the shelter is in need of funding to meet their staffing needs, to address building maintenance, and to ensure staff members are receiving a regular and timely paychecks for the hours they work.

“This is where the Navajo Nation drops the ball in helping the staff and programs that help victims of domestic violence. Our women are the highest at risk in the world to be affected by violence. We have a place here, a shelter, a sanctuary for our victims, and we have to give them our full support because they provide a vital service for our people. A safe haven,” said Delegate Brown.

He raised additional questions regarding issues he was informed of regarding funding and lengthy waiting times that victims experience when receiving services from the Navajo Nation Division of Behavioral and Mental Health Services and Indian Health Service.

“I am disturbed by the comments that there is still a lengthy process that victims have to go through. I want to know how much money these programs are currently getting for the services

you are supposed to provide. When victims of violence experience a traumatic event it affects them in negative ways and they are just trying to survive,” said Delegate Brown.

Carmelia Blackwater, executive director for Tohdenasshai Shelter Home, said the federal grant funding they used to receive was cut, they currently only have two vehicles to transport victims, and the shelter currently has no funding to maintain their facility because federal funding is no longer provided. She added that the Kayenta Township rescinded their offer to aid with maintenance and as a result they are reaching out to Navajo leadership to advocate for additional funding on their behalf.

HEHSC member Council Delegate Olin Kieyoomia (Coyote Canyon, Mexican Springs, Naschitti, Tohatchi, Bahastl’a’a’) commended the shelter for continuing to expand over the years and for providing vital services to the Navajo public. He asked if the program has a proposal ready to address the building maintenance needs.

“Do you have a cost analysis? I want to know what your proposal is as far as what you need for transportation, labor for maintenance, and the cost of your cameras and their upkeep for the safety of your shelter and victims. I think this is great that you are providing this service, especially to men and LGBTQ2S individuals. You came a long way from a doublewide trailer to a nicer building operating on a 24-hour basis. I do commend you all because that is something to say about your program in terms of how far you have come,” said Delegate Kieyoomia.

He added that within their proposal, the program should describe how services can be expedited for victims and what is needed to ensure they never have to turn anyone away that is in need, such as victims of elder abuse and sexual violence.

Delegate Brown recommended that the Navajo Nation Department of Health, Navajo Nation Division of Behavioral and Mental Health Services, and Navajo Nation Strengthening Families Program meet with the staff and administration of the Tohdenasshai Shelter Home to begin discussing how each entity can come together to address the lengthy processes, funding, and an action plan that is victim-centered.

At the conclusion of the discussion, HEHSC members accepted the report with a vote of 4-0. Delegate Brown informed the committee that he and the entities would be meeting in November to begin addressing the concerns.

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