



## 23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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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

### Delegate Nathaniel Brown continues advocacy for Indian child welfare



**Photo:** Council Delegate Nathaniel Brown provided a prayer during the 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Indian Child Welfare Conference in Midway, Utah on Aug. 20, 2018.

**MIDWAY, Utah** – On Monday, Council Delegate Nathaniel Brown (Chilchinbeto, Dennehotso, Kayenta) attended the 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Indian Child Welfare Conference for the state of Utah, which was hosted by the Navajo Nation and its programs that work directly with Indian child welfare, child protection, social services, behavioral, mental, and physical health.

The 2018 conference was entitled “40 Years of ICWA in Utah: Past, Present, and Future,” and focused on cultural and family-centered approaches such as decolonizing Native American child welfare, understanding narratives of historical trauma and its multi-generational effects, and how to effectively focus on the best interests of Native children and their overall well-being through culture and family connections.

Delegate Brown, who is a member of the Health, Education, and Human Services Committee and the Naabik’íyáti’ Sexual Assault Prevention Subcommittee, commended Navajo Nation and Utah

ICWA workers and advocates for continuing to protect Native children and ensuring they are placed in homes within their indigenous communities.

“I thank all of you, the judges, educators, social workers, and advocates. You remind Native leaders why ICWA is so important to Native people. You have help so many families and you bring very important issues to the table that we as leaders must consider and make critical decisions,” said Delegate Brown.

He recalled that in high school in Salt Lake City, he was encouraged to continue speaking his language by peers and educators, and said one of the overall goals of ICWA is to ensure that Native children are also connected to their culture, family, language, and home land areas.

Delegate Brown said he also found it difficult living in two worlds—a Navajo person living in an urban area, and hoping to carry on traditional Navajo life-ways. He said he understood the strain of being in a foreign place, and said he empathized with Native children who grew up without their culture and language, and its detrimental effects.

“I had a conflict inside of me, being Navajo and living in western society. I went into depression and I didn’t know why. However, I found myself in my own language, I found myself praying every morning to the east with white corn, blessing myself, and embracing the air and sending out hozhó,” said Delegate Brown. “I no longer let that shame dictate my life and I am taking my power back through my traditional life-ways and being a leader to my Navajo people in my communities.”



Photo: Miss Navajo Nation Crystal Littleben speaking at the Utah ICWA conference on Aug. 20, 2018.

In addition to the discussion on Native child welfare, the Utah Office of the Attorney General Justice Division director David Carlson provided an update on *Texas v. Zinke*, a case in which the state of Texas is challenging the constitutionality of ICWA and 2016 Bureau of Indian Affairs regulations. Carlson indicated that the state of Utah, along with several other western states, filed an amicus brief in support of ICWA to ensure Native children are placed within Native families.

Also in attendance at the conference were Miss Navajo Nation Crystal Littleben who provided a cultural presentation of storytelling and performed Navajo songs, and the Office of the President and Vice President.

For more information on ICWA on the Navajo Nation, please contact the Navajo Children and Family Services ICWA Unit at (928) 871-7006, or visit [www.nndss.navajo-nsn.gov](http://www.nndss.navajo-nsn.gov).

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