



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 27, 2018

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Health, Education, and Human Services Committee applauds initial Navajo Head Start legal victory

WINDOW ROCK – Health, Education, and Human Services Committee members applauded Tuesday’s decision by the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, which ruled that the federal government must fund Navajo Head Start at the original \$23 million and provides the Navajo Nation its right to notice, appeal, and a hearing before the federal government may attempt to reduce the overall funding by \$7.3 million.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services sought to reduce the Navajo Nation Head Start budget to approximately \$15.7 million without providing the Navajo Nation notice, appeal, and hearing rights before making any adjustments to the allocation. The federal agency cited under-enrollment as the justification to reduce the budget.

HEHSC chair Council Delegate Jonathan Hale (Oak Springs, St. Michaels) said it is the responsibility of the federal government to provide the Navajo Nation an appeal and hearing before the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services made the decision to decrease the Navajo Head Start budget.

“Federal officials are fully aware that that we lack the facilities to house head start school programs, which has resulted in under-enrollment. Where are we going to put the students? Many head start classes are currently operating out of chapter house buildings or other non-school facilities within Navajo communities. The federal government should ensure the funds are used rather than attempting to take funding away from this vital program,” said Delegate Hale.

Delegate Hale added that the HEHSC recognized the need to address the critical issues within the Navajo Nation Head Start and created the Navajo Head Start Subcommittee, which has begun working with the Department of Diné Education and the Office of the President and Vice President to initiate solutions to the facilities issue.

HEHSC member Council Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty (Beclabito, Cove, Gadí’í’áhi/To’Koi, Red Valley, Tooh Haltsooi, Toadlena/Two Grey Hills, Tsé ałnáoz’t’í’í) stressed the need for Navajo leadership to continue advocating for funding for Navajo head start.

“Many of our young children depend on head start education and to take funding away from them without providing an appeal right to the tribe is very disappointing. I encourage my colleagues on the Navajo Nation Council, president and vice president, and key stakeholders to continue working on the critical issues so we can provide the best possible education for our precious Navajo children,” said Delegate Crotty.

She added that although this is an initial victory for the Navajo Nation, she stated that advocacy by the Navajo Nation will not cease. Delegate Crotty said her colleagues who also serve on the HEHSC would continue to advocate for funding for the Navajo Nation, and to speak out against any budget reductions proposed by the federal government.

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