



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Health, Education, and Human Services Committee follows up with directives regarding the Division of Aging and Long-Term Care

WINDOW ROCK – On Monday, the Health, Education, and Human Services Committee received an update report from the Division of Aging and Long-Term Care, formerly known as the Navajo Area Agency on Aging, regarding directives issued by the committee at an April 9 meeting at the Tselani/Cottonwood Chapter for the Chinle Agency senior centers.

The directive requested responses from the program regarding how issues would be addressed regarding acting and unfulfilled staff positions, utility payments at the senior centers, budget proposal for fixed-costs to include funding for elderly programs, leave without pay and proper notification to employees, proper food storage and delivery, deterrence of retaliatory incidences against staff members, and the Arizona long-form.

According to a report from the Division of Aging and Long-Term Care, they have implemented management changes and practices such as improving communication through documentation of phone calls and official documents, each program/agency will need to develop their own budget based on their needs, reinforcing the Plan of Operation, and incorporating a management structure for quality improvement.

The report went on to state that they concentrated on financial concerns such as utility payments by setting up a direct payment each month from their operating account, reconsideration of contractual agreements with meat and grocery providers to address health concerns, and addressing alleged retaliatory incidents from supervisors against staff.

EHSC chair Council Delegate Jonathan Hale (Oak Springs, St. Michaels) said the report did not address all the issues stated in the directive, and said one of the main concerns was the acting status of the program manager for the Chinle Agency and developing a proposed budget to add elderly services as a fixed-cost to the Navajo Nation annual budget.

“We are also awaiting feedback on the acting status of the program manager for Chinle Agency. Is that being addressed? This isn’t just a problem for your program, but for other divisions and programs on the Navajo Nation. If it’s not discussed here, it always comes up during the budget

season, and leaders ask why are these acting positions still here? The issue is positions are being advertised, but no one is applying possibly because the stipulations pertaining to the position is so difficult you can't get anyone to apply," said Delegate Hale.

He added that the program should update its Position Classification Questionnaire that would amend the qualifications of the position and allow for college graduates or provide current staff an opportunity to apply.

EHSC member Council Delegate Nelson S. BeGaye (Lukachukai, Rock Point, Round Rock, Tsaile/Wheatfields, Tsé Ch'izhi) raised concerns regarding senior centers being charged late fees and disconnection notices for utilities by the Navajo Tribal Utility Authority.

"Why is the NTUA even issuing out a disconnect notice and charging a late fee to senior centers? They have no business doing that, and we need a better system in working with them. They could utilize a 12-month pay plan and used that as a fixed-cost, and our senior centers would not need to worry about it," said Delegate BeGaye.

Delegate BeGaye said senior centers in his area have also had issues with NTUA not being able to fulfill utility work requests in a timely manner, and stressed to the Division of Aging and Long-Term Care to meet with the utility company to work out an agreement to ensure services to Navajo elderly are not interrupted due to billing issues.

Delegate Hale said the elderly program would need to provide another update report regarding the unaddressed directives and are scheduled to meet with the program again on May 21. He encouraged the program to also work with the Office of the President and Vice President to determine how additional funding could be provided to the program through the Navajo Nation Permanent Trust Fund.

EHSC members voted 3-0 to accept the report.

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