



Health, Education, and Human Services Committee receives DSS domestic violence shelter, burial assistance reports

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WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — The Health, Education, and Human Services Committee (HEHSC) of the 24th Navajo Nation Council met via teleconference on Jun. 17 to receive a report by Navajo Nation Division of Social Services (DSS) Executive Director Deanna Neswood-Gishey and Navajo Children and Family Services Program Director Regina Yazzie. They reported that seven domestic violence shelters received \$1.8 million in Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA) funding through the Navajo Nation. Yazzie added that insurance liability certificates were requested of the shelters on June 12 and received four of seven certificates.

Council Delegate Carl R. Slater (Lukachukai, Rock Point, Round Rock, Tsaile/Wheatfields and Tsé Ch'izhi), vice chair of HEHSC, requested a budget from DSS on behalf of the shelters. Brenda Tsosie, principal accountant for the DSS, verbally reported that of the \$1.8 million from FVPSA, 30 percent is distributed to administrative services and 70 direct to direct services. Delegates also added requests for budgets and reports from the individual shelters.

Council Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty (Cove, Toadlena/Two Grey Hills, Red Valley Tse'alnaozt'i'i, Sheepsprings, Beclabito, Gadiiahi/To'Koi) emphasized that shelters are especially important right now because of the rise in domestic violence due to coronavirus (COVID-19) shelter-in-place orders.

"If our most vulnerable are not taken care of, then we can't praise our other efforts," Delegate Crotty said. She urged the committee to consider including shelters in the expenditure plans for the federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Stimulus (CARES) Act funding received by the Navajo Nation.

Council Delegate Daniel E. Tso (Little Water, Pueblo Pintado, Torreon, Whitehorse Lake, Baca/Brewitt, Casamero Lake, Ojo Encino, Counselor), chairman of HEHSC, requested a specific report on services that shelters provide and their operations. The committee scheduled a work session with the Navajo Nation Department of Justice, Office of the Controller and DSS regarding funding to Navajo Nation shelters and the contracts to nonprofits scheduled for Jun. 22.

Council Delegate Otto Tso (Tó Nanees Dizi) further expressed concern that the federally-funded Burial Assistance program run by the Navajo Nation was discriminatory against Navajo citizens that live off the reservation, making them unable to receive assistance.

Director Neswood-Gishey explained that, per Public Law 93-638, any professional services require a contract. This is to ensure a mortuary is carrying out the required services and so that the Navajo Nation can hold the mortuary accountable if they do not follow through with the proper services.

Delegate Otto Tso introduced Jeff Begay, Jr., who recently lost his father to COVID-19. Begay explained that his family was denied assistance and was told by the funeral home that it would not accept burial assistance funds from the Navajo Nation because it did not have a contract, nor wanted to enter into one, with the Navajo Nation.

Under recommendation of Council Delegate Pernell Halona (Coyote Canyon, Mexican Springs, Naschitti, Tohatchi, Bahastl'a'a'), member of HEHSC, Chairman Daniel Tso will sponsor legislation that would give assistance directly to families so that there is flexibility in the mortuaries available to be used.

HEHSC accepted the with a vote of 3 in favor, 2 opposed vote with the chair not voting.

The committee considered Legislation No. 0286-19, an amendment to Navajo Nation Council Resolution No. CO-64-17, "Declaring the Second Friday in May to be known as 'Navajo Police Officer Day' within the Navajo Nation." That legislation was approved by a vote of 3 in favor, 0 opposed.

The committee also voted to approve, by a vote of 5 in favor and 0 opposed, Legislation No. 0117-20, titled "Supporting H.R. 2339, a congressional bill entitled 'Protecting American Lungs and Reversing the Youth Tobacco Epidemic Act of 2020.'"

Legislation No. 0118-20, titled "Supporting Final Written Determinations of the Impact Aid to the State of New Mexico For the Periods July 1, 2018 Through June 30, 2019 Through June 30, 2020," was also approved by a vote of 5 in favor and 0 opposed.

Legislation No. 0119-20, regarding "Canceling the Navajo Nation Fair; the Fourth of July Celebration, the Northern Navajo Nation Fair, and all other Fairs, Rodeos, and Ropings held on the Navajo Nation during 2020," was also brought to the committee's attention by sponsor Council Delegate Eugenia Charles-Newton (Shiprock). She explained that this legislation would make individuals who hosted fair and rodeo events would become responsible for the spread of COVID-19 if people were to get sick. Repercussions could include civil penalties. The committee voted 3 in favor and 1 opposed to approve the legislation.

Legislation No. 0132-20, titled "Approving and Adopting the Navajo Nation Cares Fund Expenditure Plans for Special Duty Pay, Personal Protective Equipment and Facility Safety Assurance," was presented by Speaker Seth Damon (Baahaali, Chilchiltah, Manuelito, Red Rock, Rock Springs, Tsayatoh). Delegate Slater motioned that the legislation be amended to include the Diné Hataałii Association, which the committee ultimately approved.

Without a sponsor present for Legislation No. 0046-20, titled "Supporting Arizona House Concurrent Resolution 2001 (AZ HCR2001) Titled 'English Language Education,'" the committee adjourned until the next HEHSC regular meeting on Jun. 24 at 10 a.m. (MDT) .

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