



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Health, Education, and Human Services Committee supports intervention care to increase limb preservations

WINDOW ROCK – On Monday, the Health, Education, and Human Services Committee approved Legislation No. 0188-18, supporting the Foundation to Improve Care Access for Native Americans. The goal of the foundation is to reduce the number of limb amputations on the Navajo Nation by providing intervention care for limb preservation by utilizing a minimally invasive vascular treatment.

The legislation states that the foundation’s key role is to preserve limbs, mobility, and independence of Navajo patients suffering from diseases affecting blood circulation through a minimally invasive procedure, which entails the insertion of a balloon that is inflated inside the coronary artery allowing for increased blood flow throughout the body’s extremities.

HEHSC chair and legislation sponsor Council Delegate Jonathan Hale (Oak Springs, St. Michaels) said the Foundation to Improve Care Access for Native Americans has presented a report to the committee on several occasions and provided comprehensive analysis on the minimally invasive treatment and options that Navajo patients will have access to.

“Many Navajo people, especially those who may be suffering from diabetes, don’t have very many options and end up having to have a limb amputated. This foundation has provided us sufficient information that will provide alternatives other than amputation to our Navajo people. Losing a limb can be very traumatic and I believe this procedure will benefit our Navajo citizens,” said Delegate Hale.

The Foundation to Improve Care Access for Native Americans is a Native-led foundation that has performed over 5,000 vascular surgeries within three years, decreased major amputation by 85-percent for their patients, has a staff of eight vascular surgeons dedicated to Native American limb preservation, and are projected to have 10 facilities by the end of 2018, states the report.

The Flagstaff-based foundation also stated that the intervention care includes treatment for heart disease, cancer, diabetic foot disease, and liver disease. The Navajo Area Indian Health Service only has eight podiatrists that cover the entire Navajo Nation and does not offer intervention care to prevent possible amputations.

EHSC member Council Delegate Nelson S. BeGaye (Lukachukai, Rock Point, Round Rock, Tsaile/Wheatfields, Tsé Ch'izhí) expressed his support for the foundation's initiative and stressed that the Navajo public needs to be educated on these types of options, and to continue advocating to IHS and other 638 health care programs to provide the same alternatives for limb preservation.

"Until you see a family member with a limb amputated or a loved one going to the hospital for a possible procedure, then it really concerns you. As leaders, we understand that many diseases plague our people and I am happy to see innovative practices in medicine making its way to our Nation to help our people," said Delegate BeGaye.

EHSC members voted 4-0 to approve Legislation No. 0188-18. The bill moves forward to the Naabik'íyáti' Committee, which serves as the final authority for the legislation.

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