



24th Navajo Nation Council

Office of the Speaker

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Plan of Operation in Place for Program Training Healing Practitioners

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — The 24th Navajo Nation Council's Health, Education, and Human Services Committee approved Legislation 0090-19, an amended plan of operation governing the Navajo Traditional Apprenticeship Project (NTAP) at its meeting in the Dept. of Diné Education auditorium May 13, 2019.

The project's main purpose is identified as training apprentices of Navajo traditional healing ceremonies, especially those ceremonies that are most in danger of being lost. The plan of operation establishes the project within the Dept. of Diné Education of the Navajo executive branch and is intended to help eligible apprentices to complete their training to become healing practitioners.

Delegate Edison Wauneka (Oak Springs, St. Michaels) sponsored the legislation and introduced the bill and his agent to the committee, Dr. Vangee Nez, education program manager for the Diné Education Office of Standards, Curriculum and Assessment Development, works directly with the apprenticeship project and advocated passage of the legislation to the committee.

Nez said Diné College officials have expressed moving the apprenticeship project be a part of the college's course offerings where it would be separated from the academic school and protected. Medicine people would oversee the program.

"I feel that this is going to become too academic, and there are regulations, policies and laws in place at an institution where you can't discriminate," Nez said. "What if somebody from a different culture comes in and says 'I want to become a Medicine Man and I heard Diné College offers this.'"

Nez asserted she feels it starts out "separated and protected," but how long would a program covering sacred Navajo elements like NTAP last in that manner.

"This should not become institutionalized, we have a place for it here at Dept. of Diné Education," Nez said.

The plan of operation keeps the NTAP program under the oversight of the DODE.

Among the list of responsibilities and authorities provided by the plan of operation are ensuring the practitioners and apprentices adhere to the cultural and social protocols as established by the traditional concepts of K'é, awareness, respect and reverence, and recommending to the HEHSC and Navajo Nation Council the list of Navajo ceremonies that are or near extinction.

Chair Daniel E. Tso (Baca/Prewitt, Casamero Lake, Counselor, Littlewater, Ojo Encino, Pueblo Pintado, Torreon, Whitehorse Lake) noted that it would be inappropriate for a non-Navajo to perform Navajo ceremonies and assured that the committee would not support any sort of initiative that may permit that type of teaching.

The committee approved the legislation unanimously, which is its final authority. It was also cosponsored by Chair Tso, Delegates Nelson S. BeGaye (Lukachukai, Rock Point, Round Rock, Tsaile/Wheatfields, Tsé Ch'izhí), and Elmer P. Begay (Dilkon, Greasewood Springs, Indian Wells, Teesto, Whitecone).

Also considered was Legislation 0102-19, an action approving and authorizing the Indian Child Welfare Act intergovernmental agreement between the state of Utah's Dept. of Human Services, Division of Child and Family Services, and the Navajo Nation, sponsored by Vice Chair Charlaine Tso (Mexican Water, Aneth, Teecnospos, Tólikan, Red Mesa).

The ICWA agreement between Utah and Navajo Nation stems back to 1996 when it was first signed, and then it saw a revision in 2007. This latest revision adds a critical interest to the agreement that prevents cultural separation of Navajo children from their families and their Navajo community, and that the values of Navajo culture are preserved. Even if children are taken into state custody they must maintain contact with their Navajo culture.

"This legislation is strengthening the agreement Utah has with Diné Bideyah," Vice Chair Tso said.

The measure passed the committee with unanimous consent and will next be considered by the Budget and Finance Committee, Naabik'íyáti' Committee, and the Navajo Nation Council.

The HEHSC meets next on Monday, May 20, in Tuba City, Ariz., at 10 a.m.

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