



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Navajo Nation successfully advocates for the use of a “Certificate of Indian Blood” to establish identification at state level

SANTA FE, N.M. – Members of the 23rd Navajo Nation Council successfully advocated for an amendment to a New Mexico bill that will allow elderly Navajo people who do not have birth certificates to use a “Certificate of Indian Blood” to establish their identity at the state level.

“We thank our state lawmakers for approving the amended language and we respectfully request the Governor to sign it into law for the benefit of Navajo elders and all New Mexico tribes,” stated Speaker LoRenzo Bates (Nenahnezad, Newcomb, San Juan, Tiis Tsoh Sikaad, Tse’Daa’Kaan, Upper Fruitland).

The bill, H.B. 99, was passed by the New Mexico State Legislature and was sent to Gov. Susana Martinez’s desk for consideration on Monday.

The legislation known as the Real ID Drivers License bill, would address the state’s non-compliance with a federal law known as the “Real ID Act,” which was signed in 2005 and outlines certain requirements for states to follow in order for ID’s issued by states to be honored at the federal level.

New Mexico currently does not comply with the requirements and therefore state ID’s are no longer honored by the federal government, which prompted state lawmakers to pass H.B. 99.

The bill drew concern from several members of the Council over the possible impacts for elderly Navajo people who do not have a birth certificate due to the fact that many were born in rural areas – not in hospitals.

“Many of our very elderly people were born in remote areas and many did not receive birth certificates at the time of their birth, so I thank my Council colleagues for recognizing this fact and for bringing it to the attention of state lawmakers,” added Speaker Bates.

In recent days, Council members along with the Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission worked with New Mexico Rep. Sharon Clahchischilliage (Dist. 4 – R) to draft the amendment that allows Navajo people to utilize a Certificate of Indian Blood as a valid form of identification to establish their lawful status.

The official amendment reads, “allowing a person to use a certified letter of enrollment or a valid identification card issued by a federally recognized Indian nation, tribe or pueblo to demonstrate the person’s identity or age or to demonstrate the person’s lawful status.”

Council Delegates Amber Kanazbah Crotty, Leonard Tsosie, Benjamin Bennett, Tuchoney Slim, Jr., Seth Damon, and Norman M. Begay recently met with several top state lawmakers and advocated for the amended language that was approved by both the Senate and House.

Council members will continue lobbying efforts and encourage Gov. Martinez to sign the bill, along with the amended language, into law.

The 52nd New Mexico State Legislature will end its current 30-day session at noon on Thursday. Gov. Martinez has until March 9 to sign the bill for it to become law. All bills that are not signed by Gov. Martinez by March 9 will be pocket-vetoed and not become law.

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