



Navajo Nation Council approves \$4 million for 2021 summer youth employment programs

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: February 17, 2021

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — On Friday, the Navajo Nation Council unanimously approved \$4 million in supplemental funding for all 110 local Navajo Nation chapter governments to be used to support of upcoming chapter youth employment programs. Delegates stressed the importance of resuming support for high school and college students on summer break after chapters were closed over the summer of 2020 in response to the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic.

Legislation No. 0002-21, sponsored by Council Delegate Eugene Tso (Chinle), was introduced Jan. 8. Tso explained the program offers high school and college students the opportunity to gain work experience during and to earn money to pay for some school expenses.

Navajo Nation Division of Community Development (DCD) Executive Director Dr. Pearl Yellowman indicated support for the legislation, stating, “The Division of Community Development, we support this summer youth employment program.” The DCD, which oversees administrative functions of non-Local Governance Act (LGA) certified chapter governments, noted the programs were not run this past summer due to ongoing closures of chapter buildings.

Tso said Navajo students often incur travel costs, student fees, supply expenses and more in the course of heading back to school. Summer youth employment programs offered through local chapters give students a means to save money towards those extra costs.

The legislation references Diné Customary Law, which provides that children are provided with education “to absorb wisdom, self-knowledge, and knowledge to empower them to make a living and participate in the growth of the Navajo Nation.”

Members of the Resources and Development Committee, which provides legislative oversight of chapter governments, stressed the importance of providing relevant job duties and functions for students. They advised the DCD and chapter officials to explore ways to support students in whichever fields they are studying or exploring.

The approved allocations for each agency through the legislation are:

- Eastern Agency: \$1,047,763.20
- Fort Defiance Agency: \$980,074.38
- Northern Agency: \$763,644.11
- Western Agency: \$683,896.39
- Chinle Agency: \$524,621.92
- Total: \$4,000,000

Funding amounts are further broken down by chapter and were calculated using the 50-50 distribution formula that integrates chapter voter numbers and a baseline funding amount.

The legislation was considered previously by the Health, Education, and Human Services Committee, the Budget and Finance Committee, the Resources and Development Committee and the Naabik'iyáti' Committee.

Pinedale Chapter Community Services Coordinator Titus Nez supported the legislation, stating: "I am in full support of Legislation No. 0002-21. Every student throughout the Navajo Nation has [gained] some experience in the annual Chapter Summer Youth Program. Whether it's about our traditional teachings, or mental health, students continue to gain knowledge. This program also provides additional funds to students to buy clothes and use for household needs in some homes."

The Nazlini Chapter also submitted its support through chapter resolution, acknowledging: "...Thousands of Navajo Nation Youth were not allowed to work during summer and winter breaks, thus depriving them from earning income to assist with academic expenses, school clothing purchase and other expenses directly correlated to success pursuit of higher education; ..." That chapter resolution was approved Jan. 12.

The 16 Navajo Nation chapters of the Chinle Agency Council also provided unanimous support of the bill by a vote of 33 in favor on Jan. 16.

The Chinle Agency Council resolution stated: "Programs, such as the Chapter Summer Youth Employment Program, provide valuable work experience and job readiness, career exploration and guidance, knowledge of local governance, community engagement, public speaking, problem solving, financial literacy, teamwork, attendance and punctuality, accepting direction, workplace behavior, post-secondary options, nutrition, physical fitness, teamwork and mentoring." The resolution noted the pandemic's cessation of any hiring activities due to the pandemic.

The legislation requires final action by the Navajo Nation President. If no action is taken within ten days of receipt of the certified resolution, it becomes Navajo Nation law.

On Friday, the Office of the Controller reported the balance of the Unreserved, Undesignated Fund Balance (UUFB), which will provide the funding for the \$4 million allocation if enacted, was \$63,795,352 as of Jan. 20.

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