



Veterans housing policies updates under consideration by the Health, Education, and Human Services Committee

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WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — The Health, Education, and Human Services Committee (HEHSC) began Mar. 17 considering updates to the Navajo Nation Veterans Housing Policy, the Housing Action Plan and the Home Improvement Program Policy through Legislation No. 0027-21, sponsored by Council Delegate Raymond Smith, Jr. (Houck, Klagetoh, Nahat'á Dziil, Tsé Sí'ání, Wide Ruins) and cosponsored by Council Delegate Pernell Halona (Coyote Canyon, Mexican Springs, Naschitti, Tohatchi, Bahastl'áá).

Legislation No. 0027-21 will update the policies relating to the Navajo Nation Veterans Housing Program (NNVHP) to address homelessness among Navajo veterans. The legislation was earlier explained by Smith to be based on updated language developed by the Navajo Nation Veterans Administration (NNVA). If approved, the amendments will entirely replace the current 2018 policies for the housing program.

Although the NNVA was not available to present the legislation to the HEHSC, the legislation was heard earlier by the Resources and Development Committee (RDC) on Mar. 3.

The RDC approved multiple amendments to the legislation aimed at establishing greater involvement of local Navajo Nation veterans organizations.

The new policy, as amended, would empower the Navajo Nation Veterans Advisory Council (NNVAC) as the recommending entity for future policy updates in place of the Office of the President and Vice President.

Local veterans organizations would also be able to support housing applicants through supporting resolutions, as required in the amended eligibility criteria. Supporting resolutions would then be used to create the waiting list for NNVHP projects.

To address instances of abuse of the assistance program by awardees looking to upgrade their housing unit, Navajo veterans claiming homelessness will be asked to submit a local veterans organization supporting resolution to establish eligibility.

Proposed language in the original legislation aimed at keeping local veterans organizations informed of waiting lists and application statuses was also strengthened with the supporting resolution requirement before the application is submitted to the NNVA.

Throughout the proposed policies, amendments were also made to replace instances where the NNVA executive director would be authorized to make program-level decisions intended to be delegated to the program manager established under current law.

That included policy language stating, “The VHP shall be administered by the NNVA Executive Director” which was amended to state, “The VHP shall be administered by the NNVA Program Manager.”

The amendments also included deletion of a ‘1,500 feet site requirement’ that imposed cost matching by veteran applicants for selected homesites that are located beyond that distance from infrastructure.

Further requirements were added to ensure applicants update their applications at least once a year to remain eligible for assistance.

Finally, sweat equity provisions were also deleted through the RDC’s amendment.

With the approval of the amendment and the legislation by the RDC, the legislation proceeded to the Mar. 17 meeting agenda of the HEHSC. Without NNVA presenters available to deliver their input, the HEHSC voted to defer the measure to its Mar. 24 meeting.

The HEHSC is empowered by the Navajo Nation Code to provide final approval for the legislation. If approved, the new policies become effective upon the certification of the HEHSC resolution by the committee chair or chair pro tem.

Current legislation of the Navajo Nation Council, including legislation with final authority in a standing committee, may be accessed online at the Council’s website (www.navajonationcouncil.org/legislation.html) or the Diné Bibeel’áanii Binaaltsoos legislative tracking system (<http://dibb.nnols.org/>).

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