



The 24TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL  
Office of the Speaker

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## Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) regulations a top priority for the Law and Order Committee

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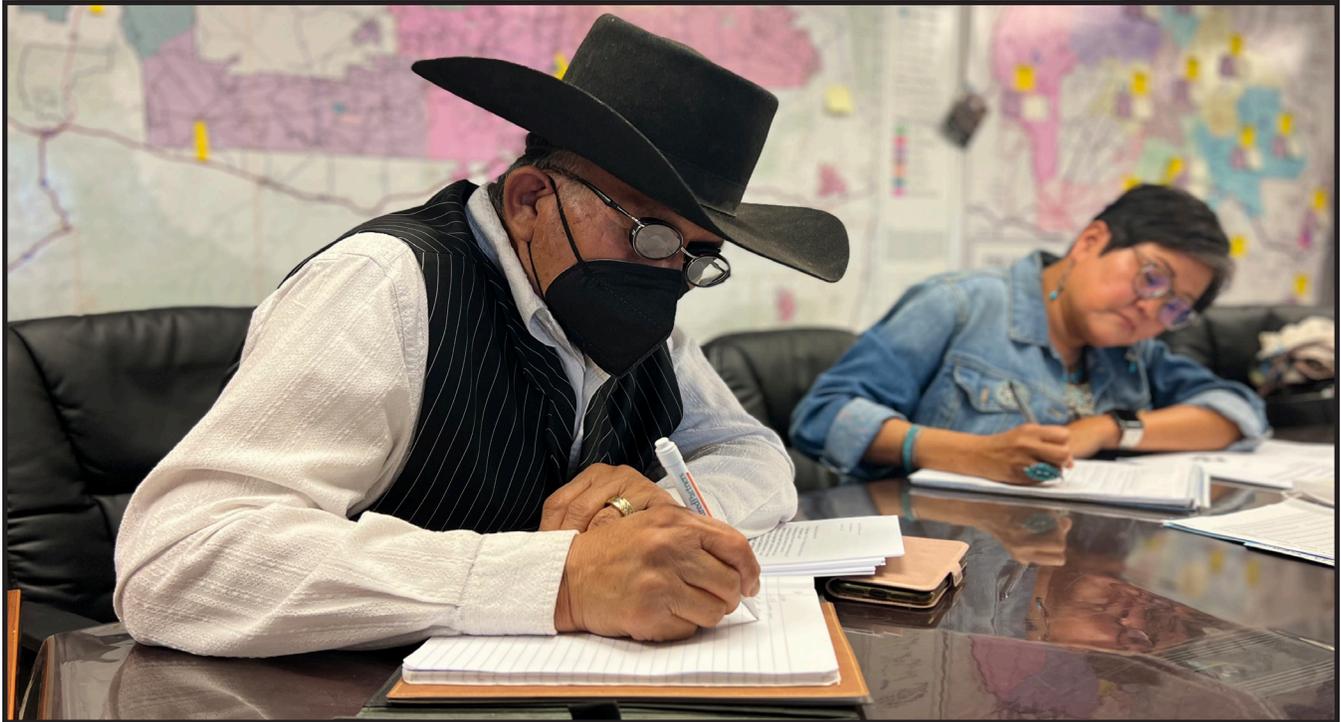


PHOTO: Law and Order Committee Chairwoman Eugenia Charles-Newton and Council Delegate Eugene Tso take notes during the roundtable meeting.

**WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.** — Speaker Seth Damon, Law and Order Committee Chairwoman Eugenia Charles-Newton, and Council Delegate Eugene Tso of the 24th Navajo Nation Council hosted a roundtable meeting with the Native American Disability Law Center (NADLC) to discuss the proper implementation of Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) regulations across the Navajo Nation.

The Navajo Nation Council passed Legislation No. 0469-17 to enact the Civil Rights of Individuals with Disabilities Act of 2018 to protect the rights of Navajos with disabilities. Consistent with Navajo teachings, the law provides that discrimination against any individual with a disability is naayéé and not only violates fundamental individual rights but also disrupts efforts to maintain Hozhó.

“Our Navajo people with disabilities must be remembered and their needs prioritized to ensure they have the same rights and opportunities as everyone else. Not only must we address the housing situation, the accessibility of our government buildings and public places, but we must also remember that ignoring the issue could possibly be seen as interfering with a disabled person’s right to vote. By not addressing public buildings that are voting centers, we make it hard for disabled Navajos to vote. our family members with disabilities face. In addition, we must also

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include an ADA-accessible playground for our youth with disabilities on the Navajo Nation,” said Chairwoman Eugenia Charles-Newton (Shiprock).

According to the Native American Disability Law Center, only 160 homes under the Navajo Housing Authority are ADA accessible, many public buildings lack wheelchair ramps or parking spaces, and assistance programs have lengthy application processes requesting ADA services.

“Over 50,000 people with disabilities live in the Navajo Nation. We have a responsibility to guarantee equal opportunity for all. I am sponsoring legislation that will create a trust fund for our people with disabilities and any funding can be set aside to address ADA upgrades. Those who are disabled should be reflected in our budgets,” said Council Delegate Eugene Tso (Chinle).

Madam Chair Charles-Newton will work on legislation to update tribal building codes and is concerned about the accessibility of voting centers on Election Day for those with disabilities. A lack of support for Navajo students with developmental, hearing impaired, sight impaired, or who are physically disabled was also reported to the committee.

“There are many hurdles in the Navajo Nation for our disabled family member. The application to rent a Navajo Housing Authority home that meets ADA regulations is over 45 pages long while many of our relatives have cognitive and physical disabilities. These challenges can be fixed with proper government support and implementing the Civil Rights of Individuals with Disabilities Act,” said Mr. Hoskie Benally.

In a NADLC survey, 35% of Navajos with disabilities had no place to sleep, 46% reported experiencing homelessness, and 67% described being discriminated against. In addition, there are no ADA-accessible playgrounds for kids with disabilities in the Navajo Nation, except in Rio Rancho, New Mexico, with a 6-month waitlist for a wheelchair-accessible swing.

“All our relatives must be taken care of and our government buildings have to be ADA accessible. The Navajo Nation is committed to ensuring our family members who have disabilities have equal access and opportunities under tribal law,” said Speaker Seth Damon (Bááhaalí, Chichiltah, Manuelito, Red Rock, Rock Springs, Tséyatoh).

Representatives from the NADLC included Community and Government Liaison Hoskie Benally, Attorney Austin Moore, and representatives from the Navajo Nation Department of Justice, the Facilities Maintenance Department, and the Office of Legislative Counsel were in attendance.

First implemented in 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act is a civil rights law that prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in all areas of public life, including jobs, schools, transportation, and all public and private places that are open to the general public.

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