



25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 12, 2023

Naabik'íyáti' Committee receives report on NTUA's Past Due Relief Program

Window Rock, Ariz. – On Thursday, June 8, the Navajo Tribal Utility Authority (NTUA) provided a status and progress report to the Naabik'íyáti' Committee on NTUA's Past Due Relief Program intended to provide a one-time assistance to Navajo families struggling with past due utility bills.

According to NTUA Assistant Controller, Orlando Pete, \$10M has been encumbered to provide assistance to NTUA customers. NTUA has partnered with the Navajo Housing Authority (NHA) to implement the utility assistance program.

On September 30, 2022, the Navajo Nation approved funding for the program. Since then, NTUA and NHA have conducted public outreach through home visit, social media, radio, text messaging, and direct mail campaigns. Pete talked about the three-phased approach that NTUA has implemented to encourage customers to apply.

Phase One took place from November 2022 to February 2023, in which NTUA focused on initial intake and received 3,000 applications. During Phase Two, which took place from February 2023 to April 2023, NTUA identified that 71% of delinquent clients had not applied. In this phase, NTUA conducted home visits and phone, mail, and text outreach.

NTUA is currently in Phase Three and has begun conducting disconnections as a final effort to get customers to apply. Customers who have submitted a Past Due Relief Program application are not subject to disconnection.

Pete said that currently 68% of NTUA customers with delinquent accounts have not applied for the program, which accounts for approximately \$6.1M in past due amounts.

Delegates presented concerns about how NTUA was considering how the pandemic had affected the financial situation of its customer base.

Council Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty (Cove, Toadlena/Two Grey Hills, Red Valley Tse'al-naozt'i'i, Sheepsprings, Beclabito, Gadiiahi/To'Koi) said that post-pandemic, many families lost their bread winners who contributed significantly to the finances of the household.

"What I'm not hearing in this report is the situation of families who cannot afford the charges of NTUA to keep their electricity on," she asked. "What have they found when it comes to some of these challenges?"

Council Delegate Eugenia Charles-Newton (Shiprock) presented similar concerns by stating that many people could not work because of underlying health conditions or because their workplaces were shutdown.

“What is NTUA doing outside of the 12-month payback program to help our people?” asked Delegate Charles-Newton.

Pete said that NTUA has seen legitimate concerns from customers who lost family members who contributed to household finances as well as customers who realized that NTUA was not disconnecting utilities and stopped paying their bills.

“It’s been a wide range of scenarios. Coming out of the pandemic has changed the behaviors of the customer base. Some of it has overflowed into a labor shortage,” he said. “Some customers who were working have stopped and are now trying to re-enter the labor market.”

Regarding the 12-month installment plan, Pete said NTUA is a customer of banks and has loans that require the company to satisfy debt covenants.

“When we carry a large receivable balance, it can cause concern from our lenders. The 12-month installment plan allows us to classify those payments as current receivables, which is why we implemented the plan,” he said. “We are not in the situation to subsidize balances.”

Delegate Crotty said she still has concerns about families that are cutting other necessities to meet the cost of utilities and Delegate Charles-Newton said the pandemic initiated a domino effect that families are still recovering from. She added that the pandemic affected all families and that the struggle to make ends meet extends across all income levels, socio-economic statuses, and employment scenarios.

“I appreciate this report as it indicates the levels by which our people are applying versus the past due amounts that exist with NTUA,” said Speaker Crystalyne Curley (Tachee/Blue Gap, Many Farms, Nazlini, Tselani/Cottonwood, Low Mountain). “We need to ensure that these funds are applied toward assisting our Navajo families in need. I encourage all NTUA customers with past due bills to submit your applications for the Past Due Relief Program.”

For more information about NTUA’s Past Due Relief Program, please visit <https://www.ntua.com/pastduereliefprogram.html>

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