



25th Navajo Nation Council

# 25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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## **Health, Education, and Human Services Committee pushes broadband and telecommunications expansion for improved public safety and economic development**



**Health, Education, and Human Services Committee members Delegate Helena Nez Begay (left) and Chair Vince James (right) emphasize expansion of broadband infrastructure to aid first responders in rural areas.**

**WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.** – On Monday, the 25th Navajo Nation Council’s Health, Education, and Human Services Committee (HEHSC) deliberated a report from the Navajo Nation Broadband Office (NNBO) on the Digital Equity Initiative.

“We are working to create solutions that address not only today’s issues but also lay the groundwork for the future for our Nation,” said HEHSC Chair Vince James.

NNBO Department Manager Sonia Nez said the initiative addresses long-standing infrastructure challenges and ensures equitable access to essential services, emphasizing the need for collaboration between tribal, state, and private entities to overcome regulatory hurdles and deploy broadband to even the most remote areas.

The report highlighted significant progress in deploying fiberoptic and cellular infrastructure, along with the need to accelerate middle-mile and last-mile projects that will bring much-needed internet access to Navajo households, particularly students and elders.

The Navajo Nation has allocated \$77.8 million to kickstart the construction of 78 new towers and over 1,500 miles of fiberoptic lines. NNBO, seeking an additional \$193.6 million, is committed to completing the crucial middle-mile infrastructure, with the State Broadband, Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) funding supporting last-mile connections.

Delegate Helena Nez Begay said, “Working with various stakeholders—public safety, education, and health services—is recommended to ensuring that our community members are not left behind.”

NNBO is working closely with telecom providers such as AT&T and Verizon to improve the 911 system. In many remote areas, first responders face delays due to poor cellular service, a critical issue especially during emergencies like natural disaster. Chair James pointed out current gaps in emergency response capabilities, emphasizing that expanded communication infrastructure will provide the necessary tools for first responders to address crises more efficiently.

Despite the community’s willingness to sign land withdrawal agreements for tower construction, regulatory barriers have delayed progress. Nez said NNBO is working with council delegates to engage land departments and other agencies to streamline the approval processes for land leases and construction. Efforts to address challenges related to power infrastructure, particularly in areas lacking power lines, are ongoing.

The council’s infrastructure initiatives support improving public safety systems and laying the groundwork for economic development. The expansion of broadband services will strengthen home-based work opportunities, telemedicine, and distance learning, benefiting both Navajo students and residents who seek remote employment opportunities.

NNBO’s comprehensive plan integrates wireless and fiber infrastructure across Navajo communities to improve public safety, healthcare access, and educational opportunities.

The Health, Education, and Human Services Committee envisions a future where every home on the Navajo Nation has access to reliable and affordable broadband. By 2030, the goal is to ensure that infrastructure, such as fiberoptic and 5G technologies, is in place to support education, public safety, healthcare, and economic prosperity.

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