



25th Navajo Nation Council

25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

MEDIA CONTACT:

nnlb.communications@gmail.com

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

December 6, 2024

Health, Education, and Human Services Committee address procurement delays and elder care gaps



Thomas Cody, DCFS Executive Director (left), Navajoland Nursing Home Board Vice-President David Nez (center), and Navajoland Nursing Home Board President Wayne Claw (right) express the complexity of the current procurement protocols.

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – The Health, Education, and Human Services Committee (HEHSC) convened on December 4, 2024, to address critical delays impacting Navajo elder care, particularly concerning Chinle’s Navajoland Nursing Home. Discussions centered on administrative congestion, procurement challenges, and the future of elder care contracts set to expire on December 31, 2024.

Delegate George Tolth expressed frustration over the extended timelines required to admit Navajo elders to Chinle’s nursing home, citing systemic inefficiencies. “It’s ridiculous. A patient evaluated in a New Mexico border town can be placed in hours, but on Navajo Nation, the process drags on for months. We must audit and evaluate these barriers to resolve this once and for all,” Tolth said.

Sean McCabe, Controller of the Navajo Nation, reported on the rollout of the new Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system, aimed at reducing administrative delays across departments. However, full implementation is projected to take at least a year, leaving immediate concerns unresolved.

Tolth advocated for a comprehensive performance evaluation to pinpoint the causes of these delays, emphasizing that existing discussions have yielded little progress. "It's time to stop talking and get to work," he urged.

HEHSC Chair Vince James emphasized the need for streamlined contract processes to ensure timely services for elders. Addressing procurement issues, James said "Our elders are a primary issue. There must be a way to prioritize elder care while adhering to Navajo Nation laws. This requires bold recommendations and immediate actions to avoid disruptions in service."

The meeting highlighted the Navajo Division of Children and Family Services' (DCFS) role in elder placements. Thomas Cody, DCFS Executive Director, confirmed extensions to current contracts will be expedited, but expressed the complexity of current procurement protocols. "We aim to finalize contracts before the December 31 deadline, but delays in the 164-review process and other administrative hurdles remain obstacles," Cody said.

Delegate Dr. Andy Nez raised concerns about potential disruptions in care if contracts are not finalized by year-end. He recommended that the families be informed if there is a chance their loved ones might be moved off-reservation due to administrative delays.

Delegate Helena Nez Begay brought her experience as a senior center supervisor to the discussion, advocating for better preparation and funding mechanisms for Navajo elders. "When I placed elders in nursing homes off the Navajo Nation, facilities only accepted them because they were enrolled in Arizona Long-Term Care Services (ALTCS). Navajo Nation should prioritize helping elders access ALTCS to guarantee their care. It's time we consider this as a long-term solution," said Nez Begay.

The Chinle Nursing Home Board of Directors, represented by Wayne Claw, noted discrepancies in reimbursement levels, which have strained the facility's resources. Claw also raised concerns about overly stringent requirements for Navajo nursing homes compared to off-reservation facilities, adding, "Our elders deserve equitable care, and these financial and regulatory gaps must be addressed."

The Health, Education, and Human Services voted 4 in favor with none opposed to accept the report. Chair James announced a follow-up work session scheduled for December 16-18 at Twin Arrows, with a focus on elder care contracts, procurement reforms, and long-term solutions. He stressed, "We owe it to our elders to ensure they are cared for with dignity and respect. This committee is committed to finding actionable solutions, and the time for change is now."

###