



25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Resources and Development Committee approves temporary burial policy waiver to address urgent needs



Resources and Development Committee approved an amendment to the current burial regulations.

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – On Monday, the Resources and Development Committee (RDC) has approved a temporary waiver to burial regulations to help grieving families facing delays due to regulatory barriers. The measure allows the Department Manager of the Navajo Land Department to temporarily authorize family plot burials in lieu of a designated sexton, expediting the process amid mounting community needs.

The approved waiver temporarily lifts two burial regulation provisions. Section II (V), which requires a designated sexton to sign Final Disposition Authorizations, and Section III (A), which prohibits any burial without a sexton's signed approval and outlines civil penalties for unauthorized burials.

Legislation sponsor, RDC Vice Chair, Casey Allen Johnson called the resolution a necessary interim solution to help families secure final disposition authorizations for loved ones.

"There's been a backlog, and this action gives families some relief as we work to revise the cemetery regulations. It's a compassionate step forward," Johnson said.

The Navajo Nation Burial and Cemetery Regulations normally require a designated sexton, an official empowered to authorize burial for each cemetery. Current rules prohibit Council Delegates, chapter officials, and various Navajo Nation employees from serving in this capacity.

Without an appointed sexton, families are unable to legally bury loved ones when plots are already established.

Navajo Land Department Manager Byron Bitsoie Sr. emphasized the urgency during the RDC's March 25 meeting.

"We're receiving burial requests daily, through calls and emails. We've helped over 75 families since last September. This waiver is about doing what's humane and necessary. We want to give families the dignity of a timely burial", said Bitsoie.

Speaker Otto Tso proposed extending the waiver to a new deadline of June 30, 2025, offering a three-month window to revise burial rules.

"We need to get this fixed," said Delegate Rickie Nez. "We don't want grieving families to be turned away or shuffled between agencies."

Legislative Branch Legal Counsel Mariana Kahn clarified that only the Department Manager—not Council Delegates, Land Board members, or chapter officials—is empowered to sign on behalf of the sexton during the waiver period.

"The legislation is clearly written. Only the Department Manager may act in this role until the waiver expires," Kahn said.

The committee also requested immediate communication with mortuaries and local chapters to prevent confusion. Delegate Danny Simpson urged outreach.

"We need to get this information out immediately so that chapters and mortuaries aren't left in the dark", said Simpson.

As final authority, the Resources and Development Committee voted four in favor with none opposed. The temporary waiver will expire on June 30, 2025, unless permanent revisions are adopted sooner.

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