



25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL

25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Council opposes Arizona State Superintendent's threats to DEI Policies



Delegate Vince R. James affirms the Navajo Nation's political sovereignty with the federal government through an emergency legislation.

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – On April 22, the 25th Navajo Nation Council introduced and deliberated emergency Legislation No. 0060-25, opposing the Arizona State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Horne's recent directives that threaten federal funding to schools over compliance with federal Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) guidance.

Sponsored by Health, Education, and Human Services Committee (HEHSC) Chair Vince James, the emergency resolution affirms the Navajo Nation's political sovereignty and treaty obligations with the federal government while rejecting the Arizona superintendent's efforts to enforce certification compliance that could endanger tribal educational programs. The legislation follows guidance issued on April 3, 2025, by Superintendent Horne, who warned Arizona schools of potential loss of federal funds if they failed to attest compliance with the U.S. Department of Education's Title VI civil rights policy regarding DEI programs.

"This legislation defends the sovereignty of the Navajo Nation and the education of our children," said Delegate James. "We are standing up against unjust mandates that would jeopardize school funding critical to culturally inclusive programs, language revitalization, and special education support across our communities."

Council members, education advocates, and local school board representatives expressed widespread concern during the Council session, citing the disproportionate harm such funding threats could inflict on tribal-serving schools. Districts such as Chinle, Ganado, Tuba City, and Window Rock rely heavily on federal funding streams like Title I, Title VI, and Impact Aid—making up to 75% of their operating budgets in some cases.

“Our mission is to provide high-quality education that honors our language, our culture, and our students’ diverse needs,” said Marcarlo Roanhorse, Ganado Unified School District Board President. “Signing this certification without understanding how ‘DEI’ is defined puts that mission at risk.”

The Council emphasized that DEI efforts within tribal-serving schools reflect treaty and trust obligations of the United States to support Indian education—not race-based preferences as the Arizona Superintendent suggests. Legislation 0060-25 reaffirms that federal education programs for Navajo students are political in nature, rooted in the 1849 and 1868 Treaties, and upheld by landmark U.S. Supreme Court rulings.

“Federal education commitments to Indian nations are not optional—they are legal obligations,” said Delegate James. “We are not subject to the same classifications as other racial or ethnic groups. Our schools are expressions of our sovereignty, and we will defend them accordingly.”

The resolution authorizes the Navajo Nation President, Vice President, and Speaker to advocate for the Nation’s position in response to state and federal agencies. It also received strong student and educator support, with many sharing personal accounts of how DEI programs empower students, reduce dropout rates, and promote culturally rooted learning environments.

As questions regarding legal risks and federal oversight continue, Navajo Nation legal advisors have indicated the Nation’s sovereign position allows it to assert objections to state-level mandates that infringe upon treaty and trust responsibilities.

The 25th Navajo Nation Council serves as final authority, voting 18 in favor with none oppose. The resolution does not compel schools to reject certification but offers political and moral support for those facing difficult decisions.

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