



25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL

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Council acts on report of discovered USB flash drive containing confidential veteran records

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — On Tuesday, Legislative Branch Chief Legal Counsel G. Michelle Espino, Esq., arranged for a USB flash drive containing confidential records of Navajo veterans to be secured by the Farmington Office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), following concerns raised during Monday's regular meeting of the Health, Education and Human Services Committee (HEHSC).

"The Navajo Nation Council has taken action to protect the privacy and trust of our veterans. Given the nature and apparent scope of the information involved, this potential data breach requires prompt and serious attention. We must ensure the appropriate authorities determine what happened, assess the potential impact and take the necessary steps to protect veterans whose confidential information may have been compromised," said Speaker Crystalyne Curley.

During Monday's meeting, newly appointed Navajo Nation Veterans Advisory Council (NNVAC) Commander Ryan Benally reported on the flash drive, which was discovered at a Farmington laundromat and reportedly contained sensitive records belonging to Navajo veterans.

According to testimony, the files reportedly included Social Security information, DD-214 records, identification documents, W-9 forms, financial assistance applications, direct-deposit information and other personally identifiable information.

The flash drive was discovered by a Navajo veteran who remains anonymous due to concerns about potential retaliation. The veteran reported that he immediately notified the Office of the President and Vice President and the Navajo Nation Veterans Administration, but to-date has not received a response.

The veteran later reported the matter to Shiprock Veterans Organization Commander Demetria Simms, who informed HEHSC Chair Vince R. James. During Monday's meeting, James asked Commander Benally to provide an update to the committee.

"The protection of our veterans' confidential information has to be treated as a priority," said James. "These veterans entrusted their government with personal records, and we have a responsibility to determine what happened, who was responsible and what steps are necessary to protect every veteran who may have been affected."

Following the report, James directed Chief Legal Counsel Espino to coordinate delivery of the flash drive to the FBI to mitigate potential impacts to Navajo veterans whose confidential information may be contained on the device.

The matter remains under review as appropriate authorities determine the nature and extent of the information contained on the flash drive and any potential exposure of veterans' confidential records.

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