



25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL

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Council advances legislation to establish \$20 million emergency response fund for natural disasters



Council Delegate Eugenia Charles-Newton sponsored legislation to establish a \$20 million emergency response fund to support the Nation's immediate response to natural disasters and other declared emergencies.

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — On Friday, the 25th Navajo Nation Council advanced an emergency measure to establish a \$20 million Navajo Nation State of Emergency Response Fund to strengthen the Nation's ability to respond immediately to natural disasters and other declared emergencies without waiting for additional appropriations.

Resolution CO-63-26 establishes the fund as a Committed Fund Balance within the Navajo Nation General Fund and appropriates \$20 million from the Unreserved, Undesignated Fund Balance (UUFB). The funding will support nonrecurring emergency response expenditures by central government divisions with approved emergency response responsibilities.

The measure comes as the Navajo Nation continues responding to widespread flooding and infrastructure damage caused by severe monsoon storms beginning Oct. 22. Emergency personnel rescued 30 people from seven families in Dennehotso, floodwaters entered homes in Rock Point and other communities, and roads, culverts and bridges sustained significant damage.

"This measure addresses the lack of a standing emergency response fund as a significant challenge for the Nation. Currently, additional funding for natural disasters depends on appropriations made after an emergency occurs, delaying the availability of resources needed for immediate response," said legislation sponsor Council Delegate Eugenia Charles-

Newton. "Federal disaster assistance, when available, may take months to arrive and generally reimburses eligible expenses only after the Nation has paid those costs."

Under Resolution CO-63-26, central government divisions with emergency response responsibilities may request funding through the Navajo Department of Emergency Management during a declared state of emergency. The Navajo Nation Commission on Emergency Management will review and approve requests by resolution. Once approved, the Office of the Controller must make the funding available within one business day, allowing divisions to mobilize resources without additional appropriation delays.

"Communities across the Northern Agency have experienced significant impacts from the recent flooding, including damage to farms and irrigation systems that families depend on for their livelihoods and subsistence," said Council Delegate Rickie Nez. "Having dedicated emergency response funding available will help the Nation respond more quickly to these situations and provide assistance to communities facing these challenges."

The fund cannot be used for regular salaries, administrative costs, operating budgets, capital assets or projects, or expenses already covered by insurance or other assistance. All expenditures must directly support the response to the declared emergency.

The measure also establishes accountability requirements. Divisions must report expenditures within 30 days after a state of emergency ends and maintain documentation for federal and other reimbursement requests. All reimbursements, including insurance proceeds, must be returned to the fund. The Department of Emergency Management and Office of the Controller will provide quarterly reports to the Budget and Finance Committee and Law and Order Committee detailing the fund balance, approved requests, expenditures and reimbursements.

To maintain long-term emergency response capacity, the measure establishes a minimum annual fund balance of \$20 million, with funding addressed through the Comprehensive Budget process. Any remaining funds will revert to the General Fund at the end of the fiscal year, as amended.

"Emergency response is never perfect, but this resolution backs the continued heroic efforts of our inspiring local leaders and responders," said Council Delegate Carl R. Slater. "Our nation has years of work ahead of us and our efforts will not stop with this resolution."

The measure directs the Office of the Controller to establish the fund's business unit and transfer the initial \$20 million within two business days of the legislation's effective date. The Department of Emergency Management must also publish procedures for divisions requesting funding.

Resolution CO-63-26 was unanimously approved with a vote of 14 in favor and none opposed. Following certification and delivery to the Office of the President and Vice President, President Buu Nygren will have 10 days to consider the legislation.

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