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July 29, 2012

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Health, Education, and Human Services Committee receives updates on performance audits regarding two Navajo Nation departments

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – In addition to approving legislation to accept federal public health award funds, the Health, Education, and Human Services Committee in their regular meeting last Wednesday received reports on the performance audits of two Navajo Nation departments by the Navajo Nation Office of the Auditor General.

Navajo Nation Auditor General Elizabeth Begay delivered two separate reports before the committee.

One report focused on a performance audit that was conducted a couple years ago on the nation’s Department of Information Technology. The second report centered on an audit yet to be conducted that will assess the Navajo Nation Department of Personnel Management’s hiring process.

Council Delegate Dwight Witherspoon requested for the performance audit on DPM last fall.

“I initially requested the review because I think their [hiring] policy discriminates,” said Delegate Witherspoon, along with other concerns.

These concerns included the following: slow referral of employment applications to departments, allegations of preferential treatment, inconsistencies in the assessment of employment applications, and perceived disregard of established hiring policies and procedures.

It was not until recently in a work session the committee held on July 21 and 22 in Window Rock with DPM and the committee’s appointed Reorganization Task Force that DPM revealed it was making hiring decisions in accordance to a procedural document that had not been legislated or approved.

The reason why the performance audit has not been completed since the request was made nearly a year ago, explained the auditor general, is because most of the files her office needs to review are housed in Administration Building 1.

The building, which DPM was housed in, was forced to close last year due to mold contamination.

Begay said the DPM performance audit will occur in FY2013, and will focus namely on how DPM referred employment applications and the timeliness of the processing of applications

Delegate Witherspoon requested that the audit be prioritized amongst other FY2013 work plan tasks.

For the time being, Council Delegate Charles Damon II recommended that Begay and her staff complete as much of the audit as they can. The committee will be briefed on the progress of the audit proceedings in Begay’s next report.

As for the Department of Information Technology's performance audit, Begay said this was completed in FY 2010.

Prior to the start of the audit, seven concerns about DIT's performance were brought to Begay's attention.

Among the concerns, DIT was not meeting the information technology needs and demands of the Navajo Nation government and made minimal use of an IT governance plan.

It was also purported that the department's plan of operations did not align with tribal governmental user demands.

The audit concluded that DIT was not able to provide reliable IT services and was not evolving with technology to keep up with Navajo Nation changes and needs.

The Office of the Auditor General provided DIT with eighteen recommendations which were used to assist the department in developing a five-year corrective action plan that suggests changes over five phases – one phase per year.

The plan was approved by the Budget and Finance Committee in December 2010.

DIT director Harold Skow told the committee that insufficient department funding coupled with budget cuts presented major obstacles in DIT's ability to implement corrective changes.

For example, DIT's proposed budget for fiscal year 2013 is \$1.3 Million. Comparing that to the \$4.3 Million the audit says is needed to implement that year's changes, it is impossible to make all the recommended changes, said Skow.

Council Delegate Kenneth Maryboy was alarmed to learn that after budget cuts the department is left with approximately \$9,000 in operating funds for the year.

"This is one of the programs that I hate to say is overlooked, but it's something that we, as a committee, need to focus on," said Delegate Maryboy, who suggested that the committee look into moving funds from other tribal programs that were not expending the entirety of their budgets.

Council Delegate Walter Phelps concurred, and asked that the committee schedule a work session in August, as soon as possible, to strategize with DIT staff on how to efficiently implement changes.

Skow was asked by Council Delegate Joshua Lavar Butler to bring with him a budget that was more sufficient for the department's needs.

In the work session scheduled for August 30, the committee will also discuss how to move forward to establish an IT Governance law that will allow the nation to consolidate and centralize the nation's IT resources and programs into an Office of Technology.

The lone legislation considered by the committee at this meeting was Legislation No. 0277-12, which was sponsored by Council Delegate Jonathan Hale.

With a unanimous vote of approval, the committee authorized the acceptance of award funds in the amount of \$624,999.55 over a three-year budget period from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The award funds will be used to conduct health education, outreach, and training to address the public health impact of non-occupational exposure to uranium among Navajo mothers and their infants.

The legislation passed with a vote of five (5) supporting and zero (0) opposing.

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