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Health, Education, and Human Services Committee recommends Navajo veterans fund reimbursement plan to B&F Committee for approval

Plan ensures reimbursement of program funds used for traditional ceremonies

FORT DEFIANCE, Ariz. – The Health, Education, and Human Services Committee on Wednesday voted unanimously 5-0 to approve and recommend to the Budget and Finance Committee a fund reimbursement plan developed by the Department of Navajo Veterans Affairs with assistance from the Office of the Controller and the Office of Management and Budget.

The plan ensures that reimbursement funds received from the Carl T. Hayden Veterans Administration Medical Center in Phoenix are properly allocated back into the business account of the proper DNVA agency that expended funds to pay for traditional ceremonies for Navajo veterans.

Council Delegate Danny Simpson (Becenti, Crownpoint, Huerfano, Lake Valley, Nageezi, Nahodishgish, Tsé ii'ahi, Whiterock), the sponsor of Legislation No. 0464-12, which establishes and approves the DNVA Fund Reimbursement Plan, said “the legislation’s purpose is to protect the money that comes back to the Nation for our veterans.”

Each of the five veterans’ agencies – Chinle, Eastern Navajo, Shiprock, Fort Defiance, and Western Agency – pay for traditional ceremonies, which is considered a form of alternative health care for Navajo veterans, and are reimbursed for the expenditures by the VAMC.

Currently, “any type of reimbursement that comes back from the VAMC goes back into General Funds,” said Delegate Simpson. “With this plan, all funds received from the VAMC shall be received and processed by the Office of the Controller, where it will then be distributed back to the DNVA point source account,” said Delegate Simpson.

DNVA manager David Nez explained that his department submits reimbursement request documents to the Carl T. Hayden VAMC where it verifies eligibility. Upon clearance, a VAMC-affiliated entity in Austin, Tex., cuts a reimbursement check and sends to the DNVA.

Nez said that this past year, reimbursement checks have frequently been sent directly to the Navajo Division of Finance instead of his department. When that occurs, money that should be reimbursed back into the proper DNVA agency business account to continue to pay for traditional ceremonies is reverted back into the Nation’s general funds account according to policy.

“We end up not doing any ceremonies because the funds have been depleted,” said Nez, on what happens near the end of the fiscal year budget cycle when funds that normally should be replenished by reimbursements are lost to the tribe’s General Fund.

After noting a comment the Controller’s Office offered through the SAS (signature authority sheet) administrative review process, Council Delegate Walter Phelps (Cameron, Coalmine Canyon,

Leupp, Tolani Lake, Tsidi Tó ii) asked if DNVA staff agreed that the reimbursement plan could be a policy document on the handling of the reimbursements for the veterans department.

Edsel Pete, DNVA administrative service officer, said the plan will eventually become a policy document that will be implemented into the department's policies and procedures of operation.

According to Delegate Simpson, if the plan garners the Budget and Finance Committee's approval, it will allow monies to stay within the respective business accounts of the five Navajo veterans' affairs agencies, which can then be carried over on an annual basis.

"If the Budget and Finance Committee approves the plan, there will be assurances as to where the money will be. It will go back to the veterans, and it will stay with the veterans," said Delegate Simpson.

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