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May 16, 2013

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**Health, Education, and Human Services Committee listens to concerns from ‘638’ tribal health care entities on proposed legislation for a NN Dept. of Health**  
*‘638’ entities advocate for a NN Dept. of Public Health but request for exemption from oversight*



**Photo: Members of the Health, Education, and Human Services Committee discuss Navajo health care topics at a regular meeting held at the Tuba City Regional Health Care Corporation administrative offices on May 8.**

TUBA CITY, Ariz. – At a meeting held on May 8 at the Tuba City Regional Health Care Corporation office, the Health, Education, and Human Services Committee was presented with a resolution backed by a number of Navajo health care tribal organizations opposing a Mar. 21 draft enabling legislation that is proposing the establishment of a Navajo Nation Department of Health.

Ramah Navajo Chapter, Ramah Navajo School Board, Alamo Navajo Chapter, Winslow Indian Health Care Center, Inc. also submitted resolutions supporting the position to exclude Navajo tribal health care organizations, or ‘638’ contracted tribal entities, from a planned Department of Health for the Nation.

The main resolution, dated May 7, also bears mention to the introduction of an alternate legislation to establish and authorize a Navajo Nation Department of Public Health, while exempting the '638' tribal entities.

Additionally, the tribal organizations are requesting for existing contracting and compacting authorities to be preserved, and that the organizations be included in discussions surrounding the development of health codes, regulations, policies, and procedures.

Robert Salabye, board president for the Winslow Indian Health Care Corporation, who co-presented the resolution on behalf of the '638' health care providers along with Wilfred Jones, board president for the Utah Navajo Health Care, Inc., said the Mar. 21 draft enabling legislation would subject the '638' entities to the Navajo Nation's 164 review approval process, which he says would create a bottleneck because of its lengthy and "cumbersome" review time.

"It's going to be another level of bureaucracy. We just got out from under a bureaucracy of IHS review, IHS approval, and funding mechanisms through IHS," said Salabye, referencing a time when the Indian Health Service maintained more wide-spread control of area hospitals.

"We have a long history in the Navajo Nation doing self-determination, and it was with the help of this oversight committee and it was with the help of the Navajo Nation Council," continued Salabye. "Keep us under your oversight. Let's work together and keep our partnership going."

At the conclusion of the resolution presentation, Council Delegate Joshua Lavar Butler (Tó Nanees Dizi) was the first HEHSC member to voice support for the resolution and the amendments proposed to the enabling legislation by the '638' entities.

"This is input from the entities that provide health care for our people," Delegate Butler said.

"I remember clearly that this committee made a directive to [Navajo Division of Health] to involve the '638' entities as well in creation of this legislation. I want to know if there has been any consultation with the '638' entities," said Delegate Butler, responding to the statement that the '638' health care entities have not been provided an opportunity to be directly involved in the development of the draft Mar. 21 draft enabling legislation.

According to NDOH chief medical officer Dr. Gayle Diné Chacon, who was in attendance, a meeting between NDOH and a number of '638' board members occurred in Flagstaff last December where "significant" pieces of the enabling legislation were addressed, and where "there were many comments from many of those here today," Dr. Chacon said.

Dr. Chacon stated that she has communicated with a number of '638' tribal health care leaders, and assured HEHSC members that NDOH officials were available to address many of the issues that discussed at the meeting that day.

"When we have one pertussis case or someone who has syphilis or [tuberculosis] in one part of the Navajo Nation and travels to another part of Navajo Nation, there's no way we can follow that or monitor that or evaluate it because no one is telling us, and we can't keep track of it. There should be some oversight for the whole population of the tribe, and that's what this legislation is about," Dr. Chacon explained.

HEHSC chair Council Delegate Jonathan Hale (St. Michaels, Oak Springs) noted to all in attendance that, at present, the proposed enabling legislation has not been reintroduced because of a HEHSC directive that was issued previously for the NDOH and '638' entities to meet and work on revising the legislative document together.

"I informed [NDOH executive director Larry Curley] that I would not be sponsoring this legislation if that was not accomplished," Delegate Hale said, adding that he has not heard of any other meetings that have taken place between the two entities besides the one he attended in St. Michaels, Ariz. last November.

After Delegate Hale reiterated that the directive was still in effect, the HEHSC voted 5-0 to accept the report.

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