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Budget and Finance Committee receives report on budget expenditures and restructuring of family assistance programs

WINDOW ROCK – The Budget and Finance Committee received a report on Tuesday, regarding budget expenditures for the Navajo Nation Department for Self Reliance and the ongoing restructuring of services offered under the program, and the possibility of moving the entity under the Navajo Nation Department of Family Services.

According to the report provided by the Navajo Nation Division of Social Services director Sharon Begay-McCabe, funds are not being spent efficiently for services such as the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, burial assistance, and firewood distribution.

“For instance, the LIHEAP administration has an unexpended amount of 96% and direct [payment to customers] is at 58%, and the administration for [PL-93-638 federal funding] is at 62% and direct [payment to customers] at 13%,” said Begay-McCabe.

Begay-McCabe added that the lack of expending is a contributing factor for the restructuring of the assistance programs and relocating services under the Department of Family Services, which is also under the Division of Social Services.

The primary issue raised by Begay-McCabe involved assistance services that were not adequately rendered to Navajo clients, which led to concerns and complaints from constituents.

“Our people out there are waiting for wood, or waiting for assistance for their loved ones who passed away. If there is an internal disagreement between the Division of Social Services and [the Department for Self Reliance], work it out,” said BFC member Council Delegate Danny Simpson (Becenti, Crownpoint, Huerfano, Lake Valley, Nageezi, Nahodishgish, Tse’ii’ahi, Whiterock).

Delegate Simpson said it is unacceptable that Navajo elderly and families are not receiving assistance services immediately, due to internal disagreements that are potentially stalling client payments and firewood distribution.

Health, Education, and Human Services Committee chair Council Delegate Jonathan Hale (St. Michaels, Oak Springs) said the LIHEAP, burial assistance, and wood delivery programs were given

to the Department for Self Reliance because the program utilized an efficient automatic payment system that processed payments promptly.

“There was no waste, no mismanagement whatsoever, the reporting [system] was there, and the data was there,” said Delegate Hale. “[These services] have only been [under Self Reliance] for four months, and now they want to take it back. Let’s talk about it, that’s the only way we are going to fix this issue.”

Currently, the HEHSC serves as the oversight of the program’s plan of operation while the BFC oversees the financial portion of the program.

At the conclusion of the report, the Department for Self Reliance director Roxanne Gorman, said that the assistance services such as LIHEAP, was officially implemented in January and since then, 42% of the program’s funds have been expended and payments made to Navajo clients. Gorman added that no reversions of federal funding were reported for FY2014.

BFC members voted 4-0 to accept the report.

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