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Naabik'iyátí' Committee disappointed in President Shelly's denial of funding for domestic violence and sexual abuse victims

WINDOW ROCK – Naabik'iyátí' Committee members expressed disappointment last Thursday in President Ben Shelly's decision to utilize his line-item veto authority to deny approximately \$470,000 in supplemental funding for three separate non-profit organizations that currently provide critical services to domestic violence and sexual abuse victims on the Navajo Nation.

Council approved approximately \$470,000 on April 23, to continue services for three separate organizations including the Home for Women and Children located in Shiprock, the Tohdenhasshai Committee Against Family Abuse located in Kayenta, and Ama Doo Alchini Bighan located in Chinle.

On May 5, President Shelly issued a memorandum in which he stated that he is obligated to deny the funding based on prior compliance performance for the Home for Women and Children, reported in the 2011 evaluation report conducted by the Contract Compliance Section of the Navajo Nation Division of Social Services.

Council Delegate Jonathan Hale (Oak Springs, St. Michaels), who sponsored the legislation approved by Council, said the president's line-item vetoes were not in order, adding that he was unable to meet with President Shelly to discuss Council's resolution, despite several attempts.

"The services that these organizations provide are critical for our communities and should not be denied based on compliance issues that were not brought to our attention prior to the veto," stated Delegate Hale. "Compliance issues can be resolved and should not hinder assistance provided to our Navajo mothers and children."

President Shelly also stated in the memo that the three organizations have received federal funding through the DSS. However, executive director for the Home for Women and Children Gloria Champion, explained that DSS now requires the organizations to expend funds at their own expense and to receive reimbursements through DSS at a later time.

"How can you encumber funds when you have no cash to encumber funds?" asked Champion, while stating that the organization's need for funding remains a burden.

Council Delegate Nelson BeGaye (Lukachukai, Rock Point, Round Rock, Tsaille/Wheatfields, Tsé Ch'izhi) also expressed his disappointment and questioned the president's reasoning for denying the funding.

“He’s able to give money to the Diné Rodeo Association for a banquet and year-end awards and we have our family members and our precious children that are being abused. What is his rationale?” Delegate BeGaye asked.

Council Delegate Joshua Lavar Butler (Tó Nanees Dizi) recommended that the non-profit organizations meet as a group to discuss their issues and to create solutions while also urging President Shelly to make the issue a top priority.

“I realize domestic violence is a monumental task,” said Delegate Butler. “[President] Shelly needs to take notice and make this one of his political platforms.”

At the conclusion of the discussion, Naabik’iyátí’ Committee members approved the report with a vote of 9-0, along with a directive to introduce three separate legislations to request funding for each of the three organizations.

Delegate Hale said the legislations are forthcoming, adding that he plans to work with President Shelly to address any questions or concerns.

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