



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Resources and Development Committee approves the Healthy Diné Community Wellness Development Project Distribution Policy

TSE BONITO, N.M. – Last Tuesday, the Resources and Development Committee considered Legislation 0159-16, which seeks the approval of the Healthy Diné Community Wellness Development Project Guideline and Distribution Policy put forth by the Navajo Nation Division of Community Development.

According to the legislation, the guideline and distribution policy will allow DCD to distribute funding from tax revenue generated from the Healthy Diné Act of 2014 to the Nation's 110 chapters.

The Navajo Nation Council established the Healthy Diné Nation Act in 2014, which initiated a two-percent sales tax on unhealthy foods and beverages sold on the Navajo Nation. In April 2015, the Budget and Finance Committee also approved the Community Wellness Development Projects Fund, which established a special revenue account to provide funds to chapters to initiate, match, and improve community wellness projects.

"This policy is another step forward for the Healthy Diné Nation Act of 2014. This policy will show how the tax revenues from the 'junk food tax' revenues will be distributed and used at the chapters," stated legislation sponsor Council Delegate Jonathan Hale (Oak Springs, St. Michaels).

Delegate Hale was joined by Navajo Prep Nat'áanii Youth Leadership Council representative Catelin Dee, who emphasized how the bill would contribute to the well being of Navajo people and benefit Navajo communities. The youth council has supported the community wellness efforts for several years and have presented before the Council's standing committees on numerous occasions.

"I support this legislation because it will encourage our youth to live healthy. Also, it will encourage future generations to be physically and culturally active at the chapter level. This bill will fund many wellness projects that the youth are planning," stated Dee.

In accordance with the distribution policy, chapters are required to comply with the following guidelines to obtain funds:

1. Prepare all necessary budget forms as required by the Navajo Nation Budget Instruction Manual.
2. Submit a valid chapter resolution that outlines the community wellness projects and whether the projects will be used to initiate, match, and/or improve a community wellness projects.
3. Upon receipt of the required information, the Administrative Service Center Accountant shall review the budget in the Facility Management Information System. Upon approval, the ASC shall submit the budget to Office of Management and Budget and Office of the Controller for processing.
4. Upon approval, the ASC shall inform the chapter and the chapter shall prepare a disbursement memo to DCD and request for direct payment.

RDC chair Council Delegate Alton Joe Shepherd (Jeddito, Cornfields, Ganado, Kin Dah Lichíí, Steamboat) questioned how the junk food tax revenues would be administered and determined.

“When the 22nd Navajo Nation Council passed this bill, we assumed that the chapters would receive equal distribution of the money. Is this still true?” asked Delegate Shepherd.

DCD Legislative Associate Shirleen Jumbo-Rintila said that DCD would have the authority and responsibility to allocate and disburse funds for eligible community wellness projects. Allocations to chapters will be based on the 50/50 formula, which distributes half of the funds equally among all 110 chapters and the remaining funds are distributed based on the number of registered voters in each chapter.

Community wellness projects includes farming and vegetable gardens, farmers markets, exercise equipment, skate parks, health classes, traditional and non-traditional health food preparation classes, playgrounds, basketball courts, trails, and others.

The Resources and Development approved Legislation 0159-16 with a 4-0 vote. The bill moves forward to the Budget and Finance Committee, who serves as the final authority.

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