



## 23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **Council approves additional funding for services to Navajo elders**

**WINDOW ROCK** – On the second day of the 2018 Spring Council Session, the 23<sup>rd</sup> Navajo Nation Council approved Legislation No. 0432-17, which seeks to allocate funding from the Unreserved, Undesignated Fund Balance in the amount of approximately \$2.9 million for the Navajo Area Agency on Aging, or NAAA, to improve direct services to Navajo elderly.

The NAAA program states that elders living on the Navajo Nation shall receive all available benefits and services to which they are entitled, and that these services are provided in a manner which preserves their dignity, self-respect, and cultural identity.

According to the legislation, the additional funding would go toward a needs assessment, equipment, new vehicles to transport Navajo elderly, consultation to develop a food menu specifically for the aging population, facilities maintenance, personnel to provide maintenance of senior centers, and renovation repairs to the senior centers.

Legislation sponsor Council Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty (Beclabito, Cove, Gadi’i’áhi/To’Koi, Red Valley, Tooh Haltsooi, Toadlena/Two Grey Hills, Tsé ałnáoz’t’l’í) said the goal of the bill is to promote the expansion of services for Navajo elderly and to address facilities maintenance issues for senior centers.

“Our goal is to fully fund elder activities. Elders have a right by Navajo Nation fundamental law and federal laws to have access to services, resources, and support. We value our elder’s wisdom, compassion, and teachings. As a government, we want to put forth our own resources to improve our Diné elders quality of life,” said Delegate Crotty.

Delegate Crotty added that the first step is to expand protections, prevention of elderly abuse, and provide dignity for the care and mindfulness in supporting Navajo elderly individuals at the senior centers and within their homes.

The legislation states that external funding for NAAA is limited to food and transportation costs. Funding allocated to the program by the Navajo Nation can only be utilized for personnel costs, and to a limited extent, operating expenses.

Council Delegate Seth Damon (Bááháálí, Chichiltah, Manuelito, Tsé Lichíí', Rock Springs, Tsayatoh) commended the NAAA program for ensuring the supplemental funding budget reflected direct services to Navajo elderly, and said the Health, Education, and Human Services Committee has been pushing for a funding increase since the beginning of the FY2018 budget season in June 2017.

"I want to defend HEHSC because they did what they could at these [budget] meetings. They were battling to get more dollars for NAAA. Let's be honest in pointing out that the individual that cut the budget was President [Russell] Begaye. He cut the budget for all our elders and he funneled those dollars elsewhere. It's the president that needs to fix the budget," said Delegate Damon.

Delegate Damon said when the FY2018 budget was being drafted, Council approved increased funding for the elderly program, however President Begaye exercised the presidential line-item veto authority to cut funding within the NAAA budget that resulted in a funding shortfall.

In favor of the legislation, Council Delegate Leonard Tsosie (Baca/Prewitt, Casamero Lake, Counselor, Littlewater, Ojo Encino, Pueblo Pintado, Torreon, Whitehorse Lake) requested that the NAAA provide a comprehensive status report to determine and rank the most critical issues that Navajo elderly are facing, such as lack of running water, lack of electricity, and inefficient health care.

In addition to the request, Council Delegate Kee Allen Begay, Jr. (Low Mountain, Many Farms, Nazlini, Tachee/Blue Gap, Tselani/Cottonwood) recommended an amendment that would require the NAAA to provide quarterly reports to the HEHSC and the Naabik'íyáti' Committee.

Council members voted 18-0 to approve the amendment.

At the conclusion of the discussion, Council members voted 20-0 to approve Legislation No. 0432-17 with four amendments. President Begaye will have 10 calendar days to consider the resolution once it is delivered to the Office of the President and Vice President.

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