



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Health, Education, and Human Services Committee meets with Navajo elders over concerns with NAAA services

WINDOW ROCK – On Wednesday, the Health, Education, and Human Services Committee met with members from the Navajo Council on Aging to address critical concerns regarding services provided by the Navajo Area Agency on Aging and the Office of the President and Vice President.

The Navajo Council on Aging was established under the federal Older Americans Act of 1965 through Resolution No. ACMY-77, that was approved by the former Advisory Council of the Navajo Nation Council in 1977. The purpose of the council is to provide advisement and guidance on matters pertaining to the elder population on the Navajo Nation, as well as ensuring elders have access to services that aid individual independence, self-sufficiency, adequate caretaker services, and at-home services.

Navajo Council on Aging president George Tolth and vice president Matilda Tahe, said they drafted a letter in July 2017 to the Office of the President and Vice President and to the executive director for the Navajo Nation Department of Health, regarding their concerns with NAAA, and to date, no response has been provided to the council.

EHSC member Council Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty (Beclabito, Cove, Gadi'i'áhi/To'Koi, Red Valley, Tooh Haltsooi, Toadlena/Two Grey Hills, Tsé ałnáoz't'í) recommended that a task force be created to begin addressing the concerns from Navajo elders.

“I believe that this is just the beginning of the conversation. We have other subcommittees for head start, employment, etc. Perhaps we need to create a subcommittee or have regular weekly reports and updates regarding this program. We are trying to get NAAA out of sanctioned status and I think we need to take a more assertive approach,” said Delegate Crotty.

Delegate Crotty added that issues with senior center facilities is another area that the committee is working to fund, and may request resources from the Síhasin Fund Subcommittee. She said the original proposal requested for \$34 million, however, she will amend the proposal to ensure it meets all requirements and criteria for funding.

Navajo Council on Aging members raised concerns that included the lack of communication from NAAA and Office of the President and Vice President, the transference of funds from vital accounts to fund other accounts that have depleted funding, NCOA members not receiving meeting stipends, shortage of food at senior centers, and the lack of program reporting to NCOA from NAAA.

HEHSC member Council Delegate Nelson BeGaye (Lukachukai, Rock Point, Round Rock, Tsaille/Wheatfields, Tsé Ch'izhi) expressed disappointment with the lack of communication between the NAAA program and the Office of the President and Vice President, as well as excluding the Navajo Council on Aging from discussions that pertain to their elderly population.

“Issues like this should not get this far. Individuals overseeing the programs should have taken care of these issues long ago. Growing up, we learn to honor our elders and the relationships we have with them, so we also have to honor the services we provide to them as well,” said Delegate BeGaye.

Delegate BeGaye said at the next HEHSC meeting, officials from the Navajo Area Agency on Aging, Navajo Department of Health, and the Office of the President and Vice President need to be present and participate in the discussion to address the concerns from elders.

The Health, Education, and Human Services Committee will hold a meeting on Feb. 12 to discuss further action to impose mandatory updates to the committee, which serves as oversight authority over the Department of Health and its programs, including NAAA and NCOA.

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