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Health, Education, and Human Services Committee approve legislation to protect Navajo children from human trafficking

WINDOW ROCK – On Monday, the Health, Education, and Human Services Committee approved Legislation No. 0361-18, which seeks to amend the Navajo Nation Department of Family Services’ 2018 Title IV-E Guidelines and Handbook. The guidelines and handbook serves as a training source for childcare workers, social workers, prosecutors, judges, and other court personnel as necessary.

According to the legislation, the Navajo Nation Department of Family Services developed and submitted a protocol for human trafficking of children as a new section in the Title IV-E Guidelines and Handbook. Title IV-E of the Social Security Act allows foster care programs subsidies for out-of-home placement assistance to eligible children with special needs, and provides payments to tribes directly from the federal government.

HEHSC member and 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 since the Navajo Nation Law Against Human Trafficking of 2017 was passed, it has brought to light several disturbing cases of child sex trafficking taking place, but were misclassified as child sexual abuse cases.

“Human trafficking on Navajo Nation is not a new concept as we were trained in this new area and the many dynamic pieces we are putting together. It was heartbreaking to learn that some of our children are being trafficked by their own family or friends, so the intent of this legislation is to help protect Navajo children who may be victims of human trafficking,” said Delegate Crotty.

Delegate Crotty said the Navajo Nation Department of Family Services has identified systemic gaps in the Nation’s overall response to human trafficking, particularly the public’s lack of knowledge on human trafficking, first responders have not been trained on trauma-informed care for victims of trafficking, lack of resources for safety and mental health care, and the lack of a comprehensive policy reform within all three branches of the Navajo Nation to combat human trafficking.

HEHSC member Council Delegate Nathaniel Brown (Chilchinbeto, Dennehotso, Kayenta) commended the Navajo Nation Department of Family Services and said he has been working to bring awareness to human trafficking through the development of a Navajo Nation Human White Paper and ensuring that training on trafficking is carried out by Navajo Nation enterprises and public safety.

“I would like my colleagues to be involved in this conversation. This is where we need your continued support and to understand that this is happening on the Navajo Nation. We work closely with the Navajo Nation Police Department and Criminal Investigations, as well as our federal partners. At that level, there is still a lack of training. We need to continuously to look at our children who might be falling through the cracks,” said Delegate Brown.

He added that the program provided excellent data on human trafficking on the Navajo Nation, and encouraged his colleagues and programs to continue looking at policy reform and recommendations to improve the Navajo Nation Law Against Human Trafficking of 2017.

HEHSC members voted 4-0 to approve Legislation No. 0361-18, and the Health, Education, and Human Services Committee serves as the final authority.

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